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MISTHER O'RYAN

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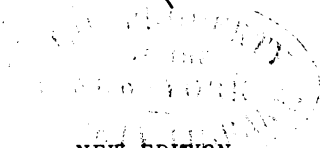
MISTHER O'RYAN

MISTHER O'RYAN

AN INCIDENT IN THE HISTORY OF A NATION

BY

EDWARD McNULTY



NEW EDITION

EDWARD ARNOLD

LONDON
37 BEDFORD STREET

NEW YORK
70 FIFTH AVENUE

1896

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

There is no intention to discuss in this story the merits of any form of political opinion.

E. McN.

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MISTHER O'RYAN

I.

FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY.

OFFICIAL reports described Ballycusha as 'a market town of 2,500 inhabitants, with postal telegraph office, Roman Catholic church, town-hall, and a sub-office of the Hibernian Bank.' There is a more exciting description in Baker's 'Guide to the Irish Highlands': 'Having driven on the mail-car twenty-five miles from the county town, we come to Ballycusha, half town, half village, a charming cluster of houses and thatched cabins, coyly nestling at the foot of the Cusha mountain and in view of the ever-boundless waves of the Atlantic. This delightful place consists of a main street, at the head of which stands the town-hall, a plain but spacious structure, the White Horse Hotel, and several shops. From the main street branch a few

by-streets and lanes where the poorer inhabitants reside. There is capital accommodation at the White Horse Hotel, the terms being reasonable and moderate. . . . The inhabitants are simple and industrious, courteous to strangers, and mostly devout Roman Catholics. There is a fine chapel at the far end of the town, and the parish priest, Father Murphy, is indefatigable both in his parochial duties and in attention to inquiring tourists. He has an inexhaustible fund of local lore, and is as beloved by his parishioners as he is respected by strangers. . . .'

It is equally true that Ballycusha is a squalid semi-village, its main thoroughfare roughly cobbled, its town-hall dilapidated, its chapel clean and fresh. In the main street there are no less than twenty-three public-houses, without counting the White Horse Hotel, a plain whitewashed two-storied building with five rough steps to the front entrance. The public-houses are, with few exceptions, devoted to other business besides that of drink. They are miscellaneous stores where provisions or millinery goods can be obtained, the public-house department being divided by a wooden partition from the front of the shop. On Saturday, market-day, when the agriculturists crowd in, even the casual stranger would observe that Ballycusha drank hard.

The purse of fifty sovereigns presented to Father

Patrick Murphy proved his popularity. After Mass he had made a touching address, describing what he termed his service for 'quarter iv a century.' This phrase produced the purse. If he had said 'me sarvice among ye for twenty-five years,' he would have loosened the emotions but not the purse-strings of the people. When, on the following Saturday, they presented him with an address and a purse in the town-hall, not one of the speakers spoke of twenty-five years; they said, 'his labours here for quarter iv a century.' Mr. Kennedy, J.P., chairman of the Town Commissioners, mentioned it: 'In risin' to prisint this addhress an' purse,' said he, 'I needn't remin' you that he's bin here—let me see now——' he scratched his head a moment, the people waiting anxiously—'if I'm not mistaken, he's bin here among us quarther iv a century.'

There was no resisting that. The audience roared themselves hoarse. Father Pat, who sat with hands spread on his breast, turned red. At that moment, he felt, his crowning virtue was the length of time he had lived in Ballycusha. Mr. Kennedy rambled on conversationally. He was a rich farmer, big and gray-haired. He could walk thirty miles without fatigue; knew every cow, calf and horse in the townland, but had not the gift of speech.

'If I may make so bould,' said he nervously, to the upturned faces in the hall, 'I'd say Father Pat was wan iv the best parish priests in the county.'

'Ay, or in Ireland!' someone shouted. So glad was Mr. Kennedy of the interruption, which gave him time, that he looked gratefully in the direction of the speaker.

'That man is right, whoever he is,' he exclaimed. 'It's a big word; but he's right, and I don't care what his name is, or where he comes from. Father Pat's the best parish priest in Ireland.'

Again the people, released from suspense, roared approval. Father Pat grew purple.

'And before I resoom me sate,' concluded Mr. Kennedy, 'I'll repate, it's not ivry town can boast a parish priest livin' here, as I may say—I hope widout offinse—livin' here, man an' boy, quarter iv a century.'

The crowd felt that this statement grew in value at every repetition. Mr. Kennedy sat down. Running his strong fingers through his hair until some of it stood up, he stared fixedly at Father Pat until reminded of his duties as chairman. Then he stood up again, making an inaudible remark, which brought a second speaker to his feet to second the memorial.

During Father Pat's speech there was great applause. When he said, 'I've seen some iv yiz

grow up from toddlin' infants to be fine young min and girls,' the women wept. Father Pat was idolized by the women : not because he was handsome—he was short, fat, and red-faced. They adored him because he knew their secrets. As he spoke, the women recognised all his familiar tricks of manner, and they looked at one another with tears in their eyes. When he said, 'I resave this beautiful addhress an' this purse iv rale good yalla sovreigns, an' I thank you, frinds an' neighbours, from the bottim iv me heart,' the women wept aloud. They exclaimed : 'Ay, an' it's yirself has the big heart, Father!' and 'More power to you, Father, avic!' He subsequently made a joke. 'As Misther Kennedy has said, I may repate, I've bin here, man an' boy, quarter iv a century. Well, like ivry man here prisint, barrin' the ladies, I suppose I must confiss I was a boy wanst.' That humorous reference to the ladies made them scream with laughter. They repeated the joke in the streets and public-houses until nightfall.

Further proof of Father Pat's popularity appeared when, the meeting over, he got on Mr. Kennedy's private jaunting car to drive home. The people rushed to shake hands with him before he started, some of the women kissing the tails of his coat. When Mr. Kennedy drove off with the parish priest, the main street was crowded. It was a great day

for Ballycusha. Father Pat took off his hat repeatedly. The people, shouting, ran in and out through the country carts which lined either side of the thoroughfare. Women held up their children to be blessed.

'Bedad, an' I'm not sorry that's over,' said Father Pat. He wiped his head, including the back of his neck, with a large handkerchief.

'Well, the people are fond iv you, anyhow,' remarked Mr. Kennedy.

'Ay, ay,' returned Father Pat, adding, after a pause, 'God bless thim!'

Not another word was spoken until Mr. Kennedy pulled up the mare before the door of Father Pat's house.

II.

COMING HOME TO ROOST.

FATHER PAT dismounted.

'Come in an' take a dhrop,' he suggested.

'I'm obliged to you, Father,' replied Mr. Kennedy, 'but I promised to see me sister at the White Horse.'

'Ay, ay,' said Father Pat.

'She's buyin' this, that, an' the other for the little woman comin' home to us from France next week, plase God.'

'Yir daughter?'

'Ay, thin. Well, Father, good day an' good luck!'

'God be wid you!' said Father Pat.

Farmer Kennedy turned the mare. Touching his hat to the parish priest, he drove back to the town.

'There goes the richest and closest man in the townland iv Ballycusha,' muttered Father Pat as he walked up the garden path.

An hour later old Martha, his servant, dished his favourite dinner of bacon, cabbage, and potatoes. Seated at table with a handkerchief tucked under his chin, knife and fork held upright, there was a glow of satisfaction in his face. When he had dined, he sat back in his chair while Martha made preparations for the whisky-punch.

'That was a rale good dinner, thanks be to God!' said he.

'I knew yir rivirence wud like it,' replied Martha.

Having mixed the punch, he took a mouthful, then turned to look out of the window. He was contented—in his pocket a purse of fifty sovereigns; the framed address, with his virtues in ornamental writing, on the mantelpiece. When the lamp was lit, before composing himself for slumber in his armchair, he read the address again: 'sublime piety,' 'noble-hearted pastor,' 'pure and saintly priest.' Standing with hands behind him, he repeated every word, including the long list of signatures, which, beginning with that of Mr. Kennedy, ended 'Felix O'Ryan, his mark.' He knew O'Ryan to be a small, lazy tradesman, an inoffensive creature, but to-night the name chilled him. It reminded him of the ugly past.

As he sat down to slumber in his armchair, he remembered how, before he went to Maynooth,

some thirty-five years ago, one Molly O'Ryan, a simple peasant girl, had accused him of being the father of her child. He had given her money and sent her secretly adrift; but he had never heard, from that day to this, what had become of Molly and her little boy. It seemed strange that he should be wondering of this now. The old gray cat purred on the hearthrug. Martha, in the kitchen, was setting things to rights before going to bed. These household sounds grew distant in his ears. He had a dreadful dream — how Molly O'Ryan's boy came back to him, a full-grown man, and a vagabond, claiming kinship.

It was midnight when Father Pat suddenly awoke with the noise of struggling. Old Martha screamed in the kitchen. Rubbing his eyes, he sat up to listen.

'Saints presarve me, what's this?' said Father Pat. He hurried from the room.

The kitchen was at the end of the hall. When Father Pat entered he saw a tramp choking Martha beside the dresser, from which several plates had fallen. The old woman's face was purple. Father Pat rushed forward.

'You murdherin' villain, relase that ould woman!' he shouted.

The man, a hungry, hunted creature, letting Martha go, turned to seize a heavy metal candle-

stick for defence. Father Pat stared in amazement.

'What, sor, wud you strike a priest?'

Dropping the candlestick, the tramp fell on his knees, uplifting his clasped hands.

'Pardin, yir rivirence! Pardin the starvin' outcast. I haven't had bite or sup for a week!'

Old Martha, who had sat down to recover her breath, now stood up. Touching her master's arm, she whispered:

'I'd betther go for the polis, yir rivirence?'

Father Pat, peering at the tramp, absently muttered, 'Ay, ay.'

Snatching her shawl from its peg, Martha went out.

'Pardin, yir rivirence,' repeated the tramp. 'Pardin for the outcast!'

'Isn't this a terrible thing intirely,' said Father Pat, 'thryin' to murdher a poor helpless ould woman, an'—are thim me spoons I see stickin' out iv yir pocket?'

'Ay, holy man; to that nifarius pridicament am I reduced.'

Father Pat looked down sternly at him.

'You seem to be a man iv some education,' he observed. 'Shure, isn't it a pity you'd be a common robber? But, bedad, you'll have to go to jail. I've sint for the polis.'

Dragging himself on his knees along the flagged floor, the tramp caught Father Pat's skirts.

'Holy man, wud you, an Irish priest, condemn a fellow-counthryman to the moulderin' walls iv a British dunjin? Is there no pity in yir breast?'

'Unfortunit creature,' said the priest, 'if you hadn't made an attimpt to murdher that dacent ould woman, I mightn't have been too hard on you. But you'll have to go to jail; an' maybe it's betther, for you'll git fed there, anyhow.'

'Look here,' said the man, tearing open his tattered shirt at the breast, 'I'm starvin'. Is there to be no marcy for me?'

His glance, wandering to the dresser, became fixed on a carving-knife.

'What's yir name?' asked Father Pat.

'O'Ryan.'

Father Pat put his hand behind to grasp a chair. For a moment he thought he was still dreaming upstairs. But there was a stern reality about the kneeling figure of the tramp, who now, with sharp eyes, seemed trying to recall something to his memory as he stared back at the priest.

'Yir name,' said Father Pat, making an obvious effort to appear at ease, 'yir name's O'Ryan?'

'Ay, surely,' said the tramp, with a new tone of confidence. 'And yours, Father?' he added cun-

ningly; 'I'm a sthranger in this neighbourhood. What's yir name, sor?'

'What's that to you, sor? How dare you ax me name!' exclaimed Father Pat.

The tramp rose to his feet.

'Maybe I know it,' said he insolently. 'Perhaps it's Father Pat Murphy, or does me mimory desave me? An' now, Father, maybe, instid iv sindin' me to a British dunjin, you'll bring me upstairs an' give me somethin' to ate, along wid a stiff glass iv rale ould Irish whisky?'

Father Pat stood frowning at the man's menacing face.

'Well, Father, the polis are on the road. I hear thim comin'. Listen!'

Inclining his head towards the door, he held up a finger.

'Father,' he said softly—'Father, avic, what will you do wid me?'

'Come upstairs,' said Father Pat in a disturbed voice. 'Come upstairs.'

He slowly led the way. The tramp grinned as he followed, rubbing his hand against his stubbled chin. When they entered the room, Father Pat, turning towards the man, said roughly:

'Shut the door.'

Opening a cupboard, he produced a plate of broken bread and meat. The tramp stood near

the table with a sickly, uncertain smile. Sometimes he scratched his cheek, or rubbed his right foot down the calf of his left leg. Father Pat, with trembling hands, placed the plate on the table, then moved abruptly towards the tramp, who, starting violently, put up his arm before his face.

'Sit down, man, an' ate,' exclaimed Father Pat. 'Sit down, an' don't be standin' there like a Mohawk. Take yir fill, in the name iv God, an' git away out iv this as fast as you can, or I won't be risponsible for the consiquinces.'

O'Ryan instantly sat down to attack the food. He ate ravenously, using both hands, though a knife and fork lay beside him.

The priest at the fire, his hands behind his back, watched the wolfish visitor.

'You poor wandherin' outcast!' said he, 'yir all but starved to death.'

O'Ryan did not look up until he swallowed his mouthful, when he wiped his lips against his ragged sleeve.

'An' it's dhry work too, sir, atin' afther a week's starvation.'

Father Pat poured out a tumbler of whisky and water. O'Ryan, clutching it, finished it at a draught.

At the same moment there was a commotion in the kitchen. Old Martha cried from the bottom of the stairs:

'Are you there, yir rivirence?'

Father Pat held up his hand.

'God be good to us, it's the polis!' he exclaimed.

O'Ryan jumped from his seat. Looking round with a hunted stare, he crouched into a corner. Father Pat, pursing his lips, left the room. O'Ryan stealthily followed him on tiptoe, leaning over the banisters to listen.

As Father Pat entered the kitchen, he smiled, then paused with an air of astonishment. Old Martha was excitedly talking to a sergeant. Two constables stood near the door.

'What's all this?' exclaimed Father Pat. 'Good-night, sarjint. What's the matter?'

'Matter, sor?' said the sergeant, surprised. 'I understood this ould woman to say you sint to the barracks for min to arrist a thramp.'

'Arrist a thramp?' said Father Pat. 'What thramp?'

The sergeant looked at old Martha, who looked at her master.

'Why, yir rivirence,' cried the old woman, 'has the murdherin' villin iscaped?'

'What murdherin' villin, Martha?' asked Father Pat, slyly winking at the sergeant. 'Explain yirself, me good woman.'

Martha, gasping with astonishment, put her hands to her throat.

'Shure, isn't the marks iv his dirty fingers here?' she exclaimed. 'D'you mane to say, yir rivirence, you didn't see him murdherin' me?'

Father Pat held up a forefinger.

'Martha, Martha,' said he, 'I'm afraid you've bin dhrinkin' agin.'

'Dhrinkin', sor!' cried Martha, aghast; 'is it me yir rivirence manes?'

'Come, come,' said Father Pat, with dignity; 'an ould cratur like you that ought to be makin' her sowl. I'm ashamed iv you! Sarjint, this ould haythen has bin celebratin' because iv the addhress to her master in the town-hall to-day. But, indeed,' he added courteously, 'it's too bad to be bringin' you out in the dead iv night on a fool's errind——'

'D'ye mane to say——' began Martha.

'Silence, woman!' said Father Pat, with appalling sternness. 'Go to bed and sleep off the effects iv yir debauch. Sarjint, will you an' the min take somethin' before you go?'

'Thank you, sor,' said the sergeant, 'but we can't take anything on duty. We'll wish you good-night, sor.'

'Well, then, if you won't, good-night, sarjint; good-night, min, an' God be wid you!'

Father Pat held the door open until they passed out, then he closed and bolted it. Turning to

Martha, who was standing with her mouth agape, he exclaimed:

'Git to bed, you mischief-makin' ould faggot!'

'Shure, yir rivirence——'

'To bed, woman!' he shouted.

Old Martha crept away.

Upstairs he found O'Ryan finishing the bread and meat. He also noticed that the tramp had helped himself to the whisky. Father Pat, angrily seizing the decanter, placed it on the mantelpiece.

'Bedad,' said he, 'it's mighty free an' aisy yir makin' yirself.'

O'Ryan, with a confidential grin, glanced up from his plate.

'Ay, free an' aisy, as you comprehensibly tarm it,' said he.

'Well, me fine fella,' said Father Pat, 'I've now saved you from prisin out iv pity for yir unfortunit condition——'

'Ay, out iv pity,' echoed O'Ryan.

'An' now,' said Father Pat, annoyed by the man's manner, 'if you've finished yir male, I'll trouble you to git out iv this as fast as yir legs can carry you.'

'Out iv yir house, rivirind sir?' said O'Ryan, wiping his mouth for the last time on the table-cloth.

'Out iv the house, iv coorse!'

Father Pat bent his brows.

'I'll go in the mornin',' said O'Ryan.

'What, sor!' exclaimed Father Pat. 'Do you dar to——'

'I dar to stay here to-night,' said O'Ryan; 'I'm dead bate for sleep.'

'Shure, even if I was mad enough to let you stay here, there isn't a spare bed in the house.'

O'Ryan limped to a corner.

'I'm no epicure,' said he. 'This is good enough for the world's outcast.'

He lay down next the fireplace. Resting his head on his arm, he closed his eyes.

Father Pat speechlessly stared at him.

'Git up out iv that!' he said at last.

There was no answer. The tramp snored; he was fast asleep.

'Well, this bates Banagher!' muttered Father Pat, sinking into his armchair. He sat there, deep in recollection. By-and-by, approaching the corner, he bent down, shading his eyes with his hand, to gaze intently at the face of the tramp.

'Ay, ay,' said he, 'the same black hair, the long nose an' thin lips. It has found me out at last, afther thirty-five years.'

Lifting his cloak from a chair, he spread it gently over the recumbent figure. Then, sighing deeply, he took up the lamp to light himself to bed.

III.

NORA KENNEDY.

ONE wet morning Farmer Kennedy, entering his house, was met by his daughter Nora.

'Oh, father,' she exclaimed, 'how wet you are! Come in quick.' She felt his shoulders. 'You must take off your coat and get a dry one.'

He laughed as he entered the breakfast parlour.

'Be aisy, Nora,' said he. 'D'you think I've bin thramping about for sixty years, hail, rain, an' snow, to mind a weeshy shower like that? Shure, it's mighty partiklar you've become since you wint to France. Hoo, I smell somethin' nice for breakfist —ham an' eggs an' a hot cup iv tay.'

'Tea, father.'

'Well, tea; though how you make tea out iv t-a-y bates Banagher. Educashin's a grate thing, intirely. Wurra, wurra, an' a clane table-cloth! Troth, it's yirself's the dainty little woman. Maybe it's a kiss you'd like to give yir ould father, now.'

He sat down at table, turning up his coat-sleeves. Nora put her arms about his neck to kiss him, then, sitting down opposite to him, her elbows on the table, rested her chin on her hands. When he smacked his lips her face twitched.

'I hope it's not going to be wet all day,' said she. 'Oh, father!'

He looked up.

'What's the matter, little woman?'

'Nothing, father,' she replied. Then, after a pause: 'Oh, father!'

He partly rose from his chair.

'Me darlint child!' he exclaimed; 'aren't you well? Is there anything the matter wid you?'

'Oh no, father; but the way you smack your lips!'

'Is that all?' he exclaimed. 'An' why shouldn't I smack me lips, if only out iv compliment to the nice breakfast you made for yir ould father? It's not a crime to smack yir lips, is it?'

'No, father, it is not a crime.'

'And what is it?' asked Mr. Kennedy, parading his knowledge as J.P.—'a misdemainyir?'

'No, dear; misbehaviour, perhaps. It's not nice to listen to.'

'I've misbehaved meself, have I? All right. I fine meself ten shillins or go to jail for a week.' He attacked a fresh dish of bacon and eggs. 'And

now, me lady,' he added, 'is there any other thing you could improve me manners in? Think now.'

She made pretence of meditating as she rested a spoon against her closed lips. After a moment or two she said brightly:

'Only one, sir.'

'Bedad, am I so near perfection? Only one! Out wid it. Wait now till I have a mouthful iv tay—tea, tea—it'll fortify me. Now then.'

'Well, father,' said Nora gently, 'you should wipe your boots on the mat before you come into the room.'

'Is that what all the fuss is about? Why, I'll wipe them on the carpit if it pleases you.'

'But that's just the point,' said she quickly. 'I intend to get a new carpet for this room soon. This one,' looking down pityingly at it, 'is simply a disgrace.'

'An' am I to pay for the new one?'

She opened her eyes with an air of innocent surprise.

'Certainly, sir. Who else?'

Having finished breakfast, he tilted back his chair, and stretching his legs, he thrust his hands into his pockets.

'You won't get any money,' said he, 'out iv me for a new carpet. That,' looking down, 'is a

dacent, honest carpet, an' was good enough for yir mother before you were born.'

He glanced at the portrait of Nora's mother which hung on the wall. Nora rose quickly from her chair, and sat down on her father's knee. Putting her arms about his neck, she laid her cheek against his.

'Sure you wouldn't deny your Nora a new carpet,' she whispered.

'Go along wid you!' shouted Mr. Kennedy 'None iv yir blarney. It won't do.'

'But, father, I ask for so little.'

He stroked her hair.

'Ay, troth,' said he. 'You've only bin two days home, an' you've got twenty odd pounds already for dresses an' fiddle-faddles. No, little woman, everything in raison.'

'But, sure, a carpet for this small room wouldn't cost much,' she murmured. 'It's so shabby, this one. Do, father!' with a vigorous embrace.

'No, little woman; money's too hard to get these bad times. Whist! Who's that comin' up the road?' He was looking over her shoulder through the window. She turned to look too. 'Tare an' 'ounds!' he continued, 'if it isn't young Val Blake. What are you blushin' for, Miss Kennedy?'

'Blushing, father?' cried Nora, jumping from

his knee to arrange her hair in the mirror over the fireplace. 'I'm not blushing. Why should I blush?'

'Shure, I thought you an' he were as thick as blackberries before you went away——'

'Nonsense, father! Besides, I was only a bit of a girl then.'

'Faith, if two years made a woman iv you, you grew mighty fast. I'm thinkin' you wouldn't object to a smack iv his lips now. He's comin' up to the house to see you.'

She turned to clear the breakfast-table.

'Well, all right,' said she. 'Let him come. But, remember, this Mr. Val Blake is nothing to me!'

'Faith, an' he's a clane, honest lad; an' be the same token, his father, Sir Howard, is a dacent man and a good landlord. If you get Val Blake, little woman, you'll do tarin' well.'

He looked seriously at her as he spoke. She tossed her head.

'I don't want him,' said she.

'May I come in?' cried a cheerful voice at the door.

Mr. Kennedy had barely shouted, 'Ay, an' welcome, Master Val!' when Mr. Val Blake entered. He wore a velvet jacket, tight, corded trousers with gaiters to the knee. His riding-whip was under his arm, his hat in his hand.

'How are you, Mr. Kennedy? Nora! Well, this is a surprise!'

He took both her hands, swinging them apart.

'How are you, Master Val?'

Her manner was friendly, but not warm. She did not return the pressure of his hands.

'Why, shure, didn't you know she was comin' home?' asked Mr. Kennedy, in surprise.

Val Blake, who had been gazing smilingly at Nora, turned hurriedly to her father.

'Why, of course,' said he; 'that is, I knew in a general way, but wasn't quite sure of the day. By the way, have I interrupted breakfast?'

'Not at all,' replied Mr. Kennedy. 'Sit down and make yourself at home. Nora had her breakfast early, an' I had mine afther a turn round the farm. An' look at that table, Master Val! There's a change. Flowers on the table, an' a cloth as white as the driven snow. Nora's come back a regilar Frenchwoman, as dainty as you plaze.'

'Shut up, father!' said Nora, looking over her shoulder as she removed the cups to a sideboard.

'Now, then!' said Mr. Kennedy, winking at Val. 'Didn't I tell you? There's an illigant French phrase—"shut up."'

'What a goose you are, father!' observed Nora, briskly dusting the crumbs.

'Hear that, now!' returned Mr. Kennedy admiringly. 'She spakes Frinch like a native. If all the young min in the county aren't cuttin' aich other's throats about her soon, I'll say there isn't a man among thim!'

Val Blake smiled as he turned to look confidentially at Nora. But she said coldly:

'Father, you see, is as silly as ever.'

Presently, when a servant-girl appeared, Nora helped her to clear the table. Mr. Kennedy invited Mr. Blake to the stables to see a new foal. As he followed, Val looked back to catch Nora's eye, but she made no sign.

When Delia, the barefooted girl, had cleared away the breakfast things, Nora ran upstairs to her room for a writing-desk. Here she lingered a few moments to arrange her hair, placing a bunch of fresh flowers in her bosom. She descended to the breakfast-room with the desk under her arm. She had just written, in her small, neat writing, 'Dearest Sister Angélique,' when Val Blake entered the room.

'Nora!' he cried appealingly.

She looked up quietly at his flushed face.

'What is the matter?' she asked.

'Ah, Nora, you don't know how I have missed you for the last two years.'

She bit the top of her pen.

'You don't seem to have suffered much in health,' she observed.

'Well, I am not one of those fellow who pine away, and all that sentimental stuff. But I missed you very much, all the same. What are you doing?'

Resting his hand on the back of her chair, he peered over her shoulder, but she hurriedly shut up the writing-desk.

'Only writing a letter,' she replied. 'Writing,' she added, 'to Sister Angélique.'

'Oh! And who is Sister Ann—what is it?'

She smiled up at him.

'Sister Angélique,' she replied. 'The dearest of friends—my favourite nun at school. Oh, such a sweet woman!'

He seized her hands.

'I know a sweeter!' he exclaimed. 'Come, Nora, let me welcome you back as in the old days.'

'Master Val!' cried Nora, breaking from him. 'Don't attempt——'

He chased her round the table.

'I must have one!' he exclaimed.

'Hush!' said Nora, holding up her finger. 'Here's father!'

He stood to listen. Nora instantly fled. Pulling his moustache, Val Blake gazed blankly at the ceiling. Then, giving vent to a low, subdued whistle, he went away.

Nora ran to the garden, whither she hoped he would follow her. As she walked about, she looked from time to time over her shoulder, in anticipation of his appearance. There was no one there besides herself, save an old peasant from the Cusha mountain on his knees weeding the flower-beds.

'Well, Paddy, still at work?' she said.

He was talking to himself as he groped in the clay. When she spoke he turned his head, peering at her until he recognised her. Rising quickly, but with grunts of pain, he stood bowed before her, pulling his hair.

'Yir honour's ladyship.'

'There are a great many weeds about, Paddy.'

She watched the gate as she spoke, restlessly patting her foot against the gravel. Old Paddy drew the back of his muddy hand across his lips.

'Ay, in troth. I'm thankful t' yir honour. Herself. Get a job, get a job, day an' night. I'm starvin' her, ses she. I'm thankful t' yir honour.'

'I hear you're very rich, Paddy.'

Paddy made a grimace intended for a smile, displaying two or three teeth remaining in his shrunken jaws. He shook himself in his ragged clothes.

'Ay. Ould Paddy rich! Wid yir honour's lave, there's a power iv money across the water.'

'Yes, indeed.'

'Ay. In America, now. I've seen as many as three big ships pass the Mount in a week. Three ships! Fishin' smacks wid three masts! I'm tould there's a power iv money in America. Me son's there.'

'Yes; how's he getting on?'

'He's me son,' observed old Paddy, looking apologetically at her. 'An' herself. He's our son. Larry lift us a year an' a half come nixt Chrismass. Wid yir honour's lave, if I had a glass——'

Overcome with his own audacity, he paused, shaking himself in his rags, as he looked down at his broken boots.

'A glass, Paddy? A glass of whisky?'

Nora was growing vexed. There was no sign of Val at the gate.

'A lookin'-glass,' said Paddy.

He drew his hands apart to express length. gazing at her with anxiety, lest she might leave before she had grasped his meaning. Nora turned to him, her brows puckered in surprise.

'What do you want the looking-glass for, Paddy? Herself? Oh! I forgot,' she added apologetically. 'Of course your wife could not see. What do you want the looking-glass for, Paddy?' she asked gently.

'Wid yir honour's lave, to see America.'

'How could you see America with a looking-glass?'

'On a clane day I might see Larry walking about. Herself—the poor dark cratur—but, shure, I cud explain to her, "There's Larry now," ses I (wid yir honour's lave), "in a new shoot iv clothes, houldin' up a fist iv goold," ses I. Ould Paddy's makin' bould, yir honour,' he added humbly. 'I ax yir honour's pardin.'

'Oh, you're not bold at all. But,' said Nora, shaking her head, 'even if you had a looking-glass or a telescope you couldn't see America, I'm afraid, from the Cusha mountain.'

'Cudn't——'

In profound astonishment he looked after Nora, who, in despair of Val's appearance, had walked away.

Then old Paddy went down on his knees again to pull up the weeds. He talked excitedly to himself of the return of his son Larry, who lay in a nameless grave in San Francisco.

IV.

MR. IGNATIUS O'RYAN.

On mounting his mare, Val Blake, in order to work off his wrath with Nora, resolved, according to his habit, to ride hard. With this object, he struck into an unfrequented by-way known as the Old Mountain road. It was rocky and narrow, having stagnant ditches on either side with ragged hedges. He urged his mare, Sunflower, to fresh exertions up a hill for a headlong gallop down. Checking her on the summit, he sat speechless with rage. Before him jogged a pony and trap; in the trap sat Father Pat with a stranger.

'Arra, is that yirself, Misther Val?' said Father Pat, looking uneasily back. 'The top iv the mornin' t' you!'

'Same to you, Father Pat,' said Val sulkily. 'This is a curious road for you to take, isn't it? I don't see how I can pass you.'

'Well, I can dhrive the pony into the ditch if you're in a hurry.'

He looked as if he wanted the offer accepted. Val frowned.

'Oh, by no means,' he replied. 'We're only a mile or so from the town. I'm in no hurry.'

Father Pat pointed his thumb at his companion.

'This is Misther Ignatius O'Ryan,' he explained. 'He's an ould friend iv mine, an' I'm just dhrivin' him round a bit to see the counthry.'

Father Pat had driven his friend early to the county town to purchase clothes. He had been secretly driving him home when Val appeared.

Val stopped stroking Sunflower's neck, to bow. Mr. O'Ryan, dressed in his new black clothes, raised his hat with his finger and thumb, settling it again gracefully.

'Fine counthry, sor, round about,' he observed.

Val took an astonished look at the dismal bog which stretched to the foot of the bleak Cusha hills.

'I am sorry I can't agree with you,' he returned.

'Can't agree with me, sor?' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan, with a supercilious smile. 'No, sor, I did not contimplate imayjit agreement on your part. An' why not?'

He suddenly paused to glance reproachfully at Father Pat, who had kicked him on the shins.

'What did you do that for?' he inquired, in a low voice.

'Hould yir prate,' said Father Pat in the same tone. 'Keep that tongue iv yours quiet. The only thing,' said Father Pat reassuringly to Val, 'that grows about here is turf, an' it's swoshy wid the wet.'

'It's poor stuff,' remarked Val indifferently.

Drawing his legs away from Father Pat, Mr. O'Ryan sat up.

'An' why,' he asked—'why is the turf, as his rivirence describes it, swoshy wid the wet? Shall I tell you, sor?'

He levelled a forefinger at Val, who replied coldly:

'I am always glad of information.'

'Then, sor, you've come to the right shop. The raison iv the swoshiness iv the turf is the misgovermint iv England—foreign indifference, sor, to the natural rights iv the people iv Ireland.'

'Is that so?' observed Val shortly.

Mr. O'Ryan folded his arms.

'Ay, sor, that is so,' said he. 'If the money that is thraduced through the twin tyrannies iv lan'lordism an' foreign govermint was expindid on the divilopmint iv the counthry, there wouldn't be much swoshiness about the turf. An' that result——'

'Will you hould yir whist?' whispered Father Pat angrily.

'And that result,' proceeded Mr. O'Ryan, disdaining the interruption, 'will nivir attain its great an' glorious consummation till the flag iv ould Ireland floats over the ould house in Collidge Green!'

Father Pat was so vexed that he whipped up the pony, leaving Val fifty yards behind in as many seconds.

'I think,' said Val, trotting up to address Father Pat, 'I will leave you there at the turn of the road, if you have no objection. I'm afraid my mare has loosened a shoe.'

'That's bad,' returned Father Pat. 'But, shure, you can stop anent the town at the blacksmith's an' have it set right.'

Val looked down anxiously at the mare's hoofs.

'Ay, so I shall,' said he.

'An' why has yir mare's shoe got loose?' asked O'Ryan.

Val pretended not to hear.

'I'll tell you, sor—don't kick me, yir rivirence, if you plase—I'll tell you, sor. Because iv the hardness iv the road. An' why is the road hard? Because iv the misgovermint an' tyranny iv St. Stephens; misgovermint, sor——'

'I'll say good-morning,' observed Val to Father

Pat. Taking advantage of the widening of the road, he cantered ahead, Father Pat politely stopping the trap to let him pass.

'Good-mornin' kindly!' cried Father Pat.

'Misgovermint, sor,' said O'Ryan, standing up in the trap to shout after Val, 'which is a disgrace to the boasted——'

As the pony was abruptly set in motion the trap jolted, O'Ryan falling into the priest's arms.

'Well, God be praised!' exclaimed Father Pat, angrily thrusting him off, 'it's yirself has the gift iv the gab.'

'Ay,' said Mr. O'Ryan, complacently reseating himself. 'I thought I'd surprise you.'

'Surprise me?' exclaimed Father Pat. 'Bedad, it surprised mé to hear you talk as you did to a Prodistint an' the son iv Sir Howard Blake, the landlord iv the townland!'

O'Ryan, with stern aspect, folded his arms.

'Yir rivirence,' said he, 'I'd have you know that I place me bleedin' counthry above the goodwill iv the hirelings iv foreign misgovermint.'

Father Pat made no reply, but drove smartly to the gate of the stable beside his house. The gate was shut. He looked astonished.

'What's the matther, sor?' inquired O'Ryan respectfully.

'Not much, not much,' replied Father Pat. 'Still, it's a quare thing; Martha always turns out whin she hears the thrap. But maybe the ould haythin's asleep.'

O'Ryan, alighting, opened the gate.

'Permit me, rivirind sor,' said he. 'The day has not yet come, sor, in Ireland,' he continued, as Father Pat drove through to the stable door, 'whin a thrue Irishman will refuse to attind on the wishes iv the anointed clargy.'

Father Pat dismounted in the stable.

'An' now, yir rivirence,' said O'Ryan, 'can I do anything else for you? You've only to command.'

'Well, you might sind ould Martha to me,' said his reverence. 'She undherstands puttin' up the pony, ould as she is.'

'That, sor, I shall do,' said O'Ryan. When at the door he paused. 'An' thin, your rivirence,' said he, 'wid yir permission, for I wouldn't move a finger widout lave from you, sor—so, wid yir permission, I'll go up an' have a look round the town.'

'Bedad, that an' welcome,' rejoined Father Pat gratefully.

'Before I go, sor,' said O'Ryan, 'I have one request to make. It is a bould an' perhaps an owdacious one; but knowin' the glorious humanity

which is cintered in yir buzzum; knowin' sor, that you——'

'What is it?' asked Father Pat gruffly.

'Can you lind me half a crown?'

Father Pat, feeling his double chin, looked thoughtful for a moment. Then, hitching up his waistcoat, he drew from his pocket a handful of loose silver. Selecting a half-crown, he handed it to O'Ryan without a word. O'Ryan held it in his outstretched palm to gaze at it, and then he turned with an appearance of excessive emotion to Father Pat, who was releasing the pony from the shafts.

'This to me?' said he. 'An' on the first askin'? Yir rivirence, I shall nivir forgit this act iv kindness. (I'll sind ould Martha directly, sor.) Believe me, though an outcast, spurned an' rejicted, I'll repay you a thousand-fold.'

Father Pat paid no attention to these remarks; he groaned with the exertion of unaccustomed stable work. Walking carefully through the sodden straw on the floor, O'Ryan left by the back-door, and crossing a small, cobbled yard, full of cackling hens, he entered the kitchen.

Old Martha, who was standing before the wide fire, was stooping over a pot, stirring the contents with a ladle. Her arms were bare to the elbows. O'Ryan latched the door behind him.

'Yir masther requires you,' he exclaimed. The

old woman went on stirring the pot. 'Menial!' cried O'Ryan. 'Do you not hear me?'

She looked at him over her shoulder without speaking. There was something in her expression which threw him into a paroxysm of rage. Striding across the kitchen, he seized her by the shoulder, thrusting his face menacingly close to hers. She made no resistance, but looked steadily at him. For a moment he seemed inclined to hurl her feeble form against the opposite wall; but as his eyes wandered his manner changed. He smiled, patting her shoulder. Old Martha, turning her head, saw Father Pat looking in through the window.

'Martha agra,' said O'Ryan gently, 'there's his rivirence now. Go an' give him a hand wid the refractious baste in the stable.'

As Father Pat let himself in, O'Ryan hurried out.

V.

THE GIFT OF ORATORY.

WITH his hat pushed back, his hands clasped behind him, Mr. O'Ryan walked thoughtfully through the main street. Women sitting on door-steps paused in their gossip to stare at him. Drivers of country carts turned in their seats to look after him. The idle loungers of Ballycusha, who stood outside the public-houses when they could not afford to sit inside, collected to follow at his heels. His air of preoccupation intensified public curiosity, already awakened at sight of a stranger. When he entered the White Horse Hotel, the crowd halted at the steps gazing after him.

Passing the commercial room, he descended three steps facing a window the lower portion of which bore the word 'Bar' in black letters. He tapped on the glass. After a few moments he looked over the muffled panes into the bar. He saw several barrels, a chair, three rows of bottles,

and a slate hung on a nail. He tapped again, louder. A shock-headed girl stared for a moment out of the door at the end of the passage. Soon after someone entered the bar, thrusting up the lower sash. Then Mr. O'Ryan beheld for the first time the broad features of Mrs. Rafferty.

'The top iv the mornin' to you, sor,' said she. 'It's a fine day, thanks be to God!'

He placed his elbow on the window-ledge, raising his hat.

'I return the compliment iv the day, ma'm.'

Her head on one side, she rubbed down her apron with open palms.

'An' what can I do for you, sor? We've some fine whisky or bottled stout.'

'Well, ma'm, I've heard iv yir whisky, an' I'd like to sample it.'

'As you're a stranger, sor, I'll give you the best in the house. Maybe you'd say a good word for the place whin you lave it.'

'I cudn't say anything else, ma'm.'

Placing the glass before him, she stood aside to watch the result.

'Now, sor,' said she, 'if you don't say that's as good whisky as you ivir tasted, I'll nivir sell another dhrop.'

He leisurely raised the glass to look through it.

'Don't say that, ma'm, don't say that,' he

observed. 'It has a good complixion, anyhow, almost as good as yir own, ma'm.'

'Arra, now!' she protested.

'Well, here's to you—Mrs. Rafferty, I belave?'

'The widda Rafferty, sor,' she replied, 'at yir service.'

'Well, Mrs. Rafferty, here's to yir good health, ma'm, an' may you soon bless some fortunit man by ceasin' to be a widda!'

'Musha, then, it's yirself can talk,' she said, adding anxiously: 'An' how do you like the whisky, sor?'

He critically smacked his lips.

'I like the whisky well,' he replied, 'an' the widda better.'

'I'm afeard yir fond iv humbuggin' the women,' said she, sitting down. 'But, anyhow, I'm glad you like it.'

He folded his arms on the window-ledge.

'I've thravelled in many places,' he observed, 'an' it has bin me fortune to associate wid the highest dignitaries iv sassiety; but I can say widout exaggeration that's the best glass iv whisky I ivir tasted. In proof iv which,' daintily handing her the glass, 'I'll throuble you, ma'm——'

'Ay, an' kindly,' said the widow, rising.

'It's a fine town this, Mrs. Rafferty,' he observed. 'I'm stayin' here a while wid me ould an' valued

frind, Father Murphy, an' what I've seen iv the town takes me fancy.'

She sat down again, sighing.

'Well,. there's not much bizniss doin',' she remarked.

'For all that, ma'm, the town for a visitor wid some taste for associations has a great charrum. It's a typical Irish town, ma'm, an' I cudn't give it greater praise. Its inhabitants are sthrong, wholehearted min an' kind, handsim women, very well reprisinted, ma'm, be the person I'm looking at at the prisint moment.'

'Now, if you'd said that twenty years ago,' said the widow archly, 'I might have belaved you. But indade,' she added, with a serious shake of the head, 'a large family an' the care iv a big place like this soon takes the good looks out iv a poor widda woman.'

'An' have you a large family, ma'm?' asked Mr. O'Ryan respectfully.

'Five, an' all young,' she replied, looking up for sympathy. 'The eldest, Corneylia, is a big girl iv fifteen, an' the youngest is only two years ould.'

'Ah, what care, what anxiety that must be to you, ma'm!'

'Thrue for you, sor. It's only them that has to go through wid it that knows it. You nivir know what they'll be up to, what wid tearin' their clothes

an' galavantin' here an' there. Shure the childher have no sinse. It's come day, go day, God sind Sunday, wid them, the poor creatures!'

'Still, there must be some gratification to you, ma'm, in havin' reared so fine a family, an' bein' the owner iv the best hotel not only in Ballycusha, but, as I'm tould, the whole county.'

'Well, as for that, the bizniss is doin' fairly well, I'm bound to say. We had three commercial gintlemen here last week. Misther Rafferty, God rest his sowl! I won't say a word agin him now he's gone; but he dhrank powerful to the day iv his death, an' let the place go to rack an' ruin.'

'Is it possible? Well, ma'm, I'll say this: the man who would place the mere love iv dhrink before his bizness, an' before the affections iv his lovin' wife an' childher, is a man beneath the contimpt of ivry thrue Irishman!'

She wiped one eye after another with the corner of her apron.

'He's dead an' gone now,' said she.

He regarded her for a moment.

'I will say no more, then,' said he. 'Those are sacrid tears, Mrs. Rafferty, that a good woman dhrops on the mimory iv the dead. Might I throuble you, ma'm, to fill the glass agin?'

To refill the glass of a customer was one of the few things the widow Rafferty was capable of doing

with alertness, more particularly the glass of so amiable a gentleman.

'It does me good to see you like it,' said she. 'Shure, it's his rivirence's favourite whisky, too. Be the same token he owes me a pound or two for it, but it's not for the likes iv me to worry the parish priest. Shure he let me off aisy in the matther iv Masses for the sowl iv poor Rafferty, God rest him!'

'Amin,' said Mr. O'Ryan solemnly. 'There's one thing, ma'm, that the tyrants that rule this country can nivir take from us, an' that is the deep rilijis fervor that burns down deep in the heart iv ivry thrue Irish man and woman, an' shows itself in passionit devoshin to the blessid clargy.'

'Shure, sor, what wud we do at all widout the clargy? An' be the same token, sor, I heard a quare story about a thramp that got into Father Pat's the other night, an' thried to sthrangle poor ould Martha, the cratur! Shure, I'm tould she ran for the polis.'

'Mrs. Rafferty,' said he, 'I'm afraid I must be goin' now, ma'm. As for the thramp story, Father Pat nivir said a word to me about it. I'm afeard, ma'm, poor ould Martha's beginnin' to wandher in her mind.'

'Shure that's likely enough, for ould people do git a bit wake in the head. Well, if you must be goin', good-bye, sor, an' God be wid you.'

He went out. At the steps of the hotel he found the crowd still waiting. Leaning against the tree was Cassidy, whom the Ballycusha police described as the worst character in the town, a young man who served his annual term in the militia, living the rest of his time standing outside public-houses—when not inside.

As Mr. O'Ryan appeared there were excited shouts of 'Here he is!' All the little boys pressed forward. Mr. O'Ryan stood on the steps thoughtfully regarding the small crowd. Raising his right hand to restore order, he exclaimed in a loud voice:

'People iv Ballycusha!'

There was instant silence. Even Cassidy, with his hands in his pockets, left the support of the elm trunk to lurch forward.

'People iv Ballycusha,' repeated Mr. O'Ryan, I thank you from the bottom iv me heart for this spontaynious welcome. I had expicted, whin I arrived in this splindid an' risin' town—I say, I had expicted that me prisince wud pass unnoticed, at laste, for some time. But I find be this great meetin', which has spontayniously gathered, that the people iv Ballycusha are wide-awake, an' knew before many hours that I was amongst them. Well, me friends, why have I—Ignatius O'Ryan, that you've heard so much talk about—why have I come amongst you?'

He paused. There was no reply, no person present having ever heard of him. However, he resumed in a confidential tone:

'I'll tell you. I've come down to shatter the last link that binds our glorious but down-throdden counthry to the tyrants iv the English Govermint!'

This being a sentiment which all understood, they cheered it. Thrusting his right hand into his bosom, he proudly surveyed them.

'People iv Ballycusha,' he continued, 'why are you slaves in yir own counthry? Why are you poor an' always in want iv work? Why is it this counthry doesn't advance be leps an' bounds, like other counthries? The raisin is plain. Because there's a foreign Govermint in this counthry, an' you'll nivir be able to do a hand's turn till you git rid iv the incubus! Ay, people iv Ballycusha, belave me whin I say—an' I have studied this great question in ivry hole an' corner iv Ireland—belave me whin I say that you'll nivir know pace or prosperity till the thrue flag iv ould Ireland floats over the ould house in Collidge Green.'

This, as a pictorial climax with which they were extremely familiar, they cheered again. Mr. O'Ryan, taking off his hat, bowed. He descended the steps, his admirers making way on either hand as he proudly passed through.

They followed him down the street. Many ran

to their doors to see the new sensation. Near the Court-house Mr. Ryan felt his arm touched. Turning, he saw Cassidy beside him.

'Ah, me good fella,' said Mr. O'Ryan kindly, 'what can I do for you?'

'Glass iv whisky,' replied Cassidy hoarsely.

Mr. O'Ryan playfully took his arm, and led him into the nearest public-house.

Meanwhile, Father Pat, having ordered dinner, sat down at the window to look out, wondering whether O'Ryan had gone altogether, or was, perhaps, at that moment making compromising statements to chance acquaintances. As he stood before the window, his hands behind his back, to his amazement he saw O'Ryan appear with the faithful Cassidy beside him, the rabble of Ballycusha behind.

Pausing half-way in the garden, O'Ryan pointed to the window. Addressing his followers, he exclaimed:

'Behold him! People iv Ballycusha, behold yir great parish praste! the man whose imidge is ingraven on yir thrue Irish hearts!'

The crowd cheered. Father Pat, throwing up the window, thrust out his head. With a face extra purple from rage, he shouted to O'Ryan:

'Come in out iv that, in the name iv God!'

O'Ryan, taking off his hat, remained bare-headed where he stood.

'I thank you, rivirind sor,' said he, 'for that kind invitation. It's a great soorce iv pleasure, rivirind sor, to prisint meself now to you as the riprisintative iv the warm-hearted people iv Ballycusha, who have assimbled here spontayniously to do honour to their beloved pasthor. A few days ago, rivirind sor,' proceeded O'Ryan, raising his voice, as Father Pat drew in his bewildered face, 'a few days ago you were the recaypient iv an addhress in the town-hall from the wealthy risidents iv this town, who assimbled to do honour to the great an' good man who had lived among thim for quarther iv a century. But to-day, sor, to-day you behold a different dimonstrashun—a dimonstrashun, sor, not iv the wealthy and cultured iv the town, but iv the humbler classes, who, sor, have as warm and thrue Irish hearts as their richer fella-citizens.'

This sentiment was applauded by the persons who stood outside the gate, looking as if they were under hypnotic influence.

'An' now, yir rivirence,' shouted O'Ryan, 'I'll ask you in a formal way to dismiss the meetin'.'

Father Pat put his head again out of the window.

'Me frinds,' said he, 'I thank you, an' now go home.'

O'Ryan bowed to the people, putting on his hat as he walked to the door.

After dinner, when the punch was on the table, Father Pat sat back, placing the tips of his fingers together.

'Me friend,' said he to O'Ryan, 'as you'll only be here a day or two, I'll not make a stranger iv you.'

'Yir rivirence is the sowl iv binivolence!'

Father Pat waved his hand to discard compliments.

'I'm curious to know,' said he, 'how it comes that you show signs iv great education an' powers iv spache. Where, now, were you educated?'

'On the sthrates.'

'On the sthrates?' repeated Father Pat.

'Sor,' said O'Ryan, 'you've trated me wid frindship an' kindness. I'll be candid wid you. Whin I was a boy, me mother an' I thravelled about the counthry. She used to sing an ould counthry ballad, for she knew no other, and I used to beg from door to door.'

Father Pat grew pale. He gazed at the table-cloth. O'Ryan took a drink.

'By-and-by,' he continued, 'we drifted into the city iv Dublin, an' there, sor, me poor mother—God rest her sowl!—died one mornin' on a stranger's doorstep iv want an' hunger.'

He paused, looking down into his tumbler. Father Pat stretched forth for his glass, but his hand trembled so much that he drew it back to shade his eyes.

'I had larned,' continued Mr. O'Ryan, after a few moments, 'as a weeshy lad, to repate some "Spaches from the Dock," partickalarly, sor, the great dyin' spache iv Robert Emmet; an' I used to perform in the back sthrates at night to the people. Whin me poor mother died, I was taken to a school for poor children, an' taught a trade. I larned type-settin' an' jined the staff iv a national paper. By-and-by I began to do articles, sor, an' some iv thim made a sensation. But there are jealousies, sor, even on the staff iv a national orgin. I was forced to lave, an' wandered about lookin' for something to do. But me gifts were not appreciated, an' I came down to the provinces on chance. Now, sor, I've bin candid wid you!'

Father Pat's hand was now steady enough to carry the glass to his lips.

'Ignatius O'Ryan,' said he.

'Sor?'

'You may stay here a week, or,' he added reflectively, 'maybe two. I'll make it me bizniss to get work for you.'

Mr. O'Ryan started up to express his gratitude, but Father Pat, raising his hand, said:

'Sit down an' mix yirself another tumbler iv punch. You've had a hard life, but, plase God, the worst is over!'

VI.

FATHER PAT ASSERTS HIMSELF.

NEXT Sunday, after Mass, Nora and her aunt were walking leisurely homeward, when they heard someone stumbling behind them. They turned, to see Father Pat saved from falling over a stone by his companion, a thin, middle-aged man dressed in black clothes, with a tall silk hat, umbrella, and black gloves. This gentleman had seized Father Pat by the coat-tails as his reverence was about to strike the road with his face.

'Saints preserve us!' exclaimed Miss Hannah nervously, grasping Nora's arm. 'There's darling Father Pat killed!'

'Rubbish!' returned Nora, who was quietly studying Father Pat's companion. 'I wonder,' she added, 'who that extraordinary-looking man is?'

'Heaven be praised!' said Miss Hannah, 'he is saved! Oh, my dear, that gentleman is a great friend of Father Pat's. He has been staying at Father Pat's this long while.'

'Betther, rivirind sor?' inquired Mr. Ignatius

O'Ryan as he held his companion firmly by the shoulder.

Father Pat had been momentarily leaning against his friend, with a vacant look of surprise, his broad-brimmed hat tilted to one side.

'Ay, ay,' he replied. 'This comes iv hurryin' me. I always walk dacent an' quiet. But, iv coorse, you must run afther the petticoats.'

Mr. O'Ryan smiled.

'A failin', sor,' said he, 'that belongs to ivry thrue Irishman.'

'Oh, Father Pat dear!' exclaimed Miss Hannah, 'I was certain you were down.'

'Ay, I was near it,' responded Father Pat, 'only this gintleman saved me. This is Misther Ignatius O'Ryan, an ould frind iv mine, or, I may say, with aiqual truth, a young frind. This is Miss Hannah Kennedy, an' Miss Nora, her naice.'

Taking off his hat, Mr. O'Ryan bowed, his eyes resting on Nora's face.

'Come, Father Pat,' exclaimed Nora, 'I'll take care of you. You know, I always took care of you, didn't I?'

To rouse Father Pat from his habitual air of rumination to a broad grin had always been a pet mental exercise of hers. She now opened her little campaign by keeping step with him, chatting in her brightest manner. They dropped steadily to the

rear, owing to Father Pat's slow pace. Miss Hannah, with Mr. O'Ryan, went on ahead.

'It was so fortunate,' said Miss Hannah, 'that you caught Father Pat.'

'I have be nature a quick mind,' returned Mr. O'Ryan—'a mind, madam, to discarn small things as well as large.'

They came to a turn of the road where, under a large hawthorn, some men sat playing cards, with a circle of eager onlookers. At a short distance several scattered groups were engaged in pitch-and-toss. On the opposite wall—built loosely of unhewn stones—there was a line of country girls in their Sunday clothes, occasionally throwing remarks at the men.

Miss Hannah took Mr. O'Ryan's arm. She would have hurried him on, but he stopped in the centre of the road. He pointed his umbrella towards the card-players.

'There, madam,' said he loudly, 'there you see the gay and sportive side iv the Irish carracter. Fresh from the solim office iv the Mass, they turn to light an' innocent amusemint. Play on, me frinds,' he added as the men turned to stare at him. 'I'm pleased to see you enjoyin' yirselves in the thrue Irish fashion.'

Someone in the crowd whispering that it was Mr. O'Ryan, there was evidence of respectful

curiosity which pleased him. The girls approached. Several of the men touched their hats to him. These attentions he received with dignified pleasure. Miss Hannah anxiously pressed his arm to proceed. As he turned away, he observed to the crowd :

'For fun iv the best sort, there's nothin' bates the Irish race. Ladies an' gintlemen, good-evenin', an' God be wid you !'

Miss Hannah recovered from her anxiety as they went on.

'Dear me!' said she, 'how fond they are of card-playing !'

'Ay,' said he, 'they knew me. Did you obsarve, madam, that they whispered me name ?'

'Indeed, yes.'

'It is wan iv the unplisint sides iv fame. I'm beginnin' to find that whinivir I go about the people notice me. But as for their card-playin', it's the outcome iv that singilar light-heartedness that distinguishes the Irish people all the world over.'

'Saints defend me !' exclaimed Miss Hannah, 'what's that ?'

They stopped to look back. The card-players, having quarrelled, had leaped to their feet, tearing off their clothes at the same moment, as a preparation for fighting. Some of the onlookers, excited by the combat, hastened to join it. A few of the girls ran away ; others, screaming wildly, tried to

drag the combatants apart. Miss Hannah gave a deep sigh of relief as Father Pat, with her niece, appeared peacefully approaching in the distance.

'Let us proceed, madam,' said Mr. O'Ryan, turning. 'It's only wan iv those little affairs that rise out iv the naturil spirits iv the Irish nature. Wan moment playin' at cards, the nixt breakin' one another's heads widout any bad feelin', but just for the love iv the thing. Ah, madam, the Irish race is a wonderful mixture iv chivalry an' good humour! I can tell you, madam, it makes the heart in me glow wid pride whin I think I'm an Irishman. People will tell you, an' may have tould you, that I'm iv a stern, cowld nature, but beneath it all'—he spread his black-gloved hand on his breast—'down deep, lies the warrum sympathy for ivry Irish peculiarity!'

'I'm sure, at all events,' said Miss Hannah, 'you speak very eloquently of them.'

'Do you think so?' he returned. 'Ha! it may be that I may yet spake iv them to the wurruld.'

'You've travelled a great deal, I'm sure, Mr. O'Ryan.'

'Thravelled? Why should I thravel, madam?'

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'Thravel out iv this beautiful counthry?' said he. 'God forbid! I'm not one iv thim, madam, who turn their backs on the unapproachable beauties iv

the Imrald Isle. No! Why should I thravel, madam? For scenery? What can bate Ireland for scenery? For the sight iv brave min an' charmin' women? Where, madam, will you find a nobler race iv min or more charmin' women—and, indade, I naden't go far at the prisint momint to find a rale specimin iv gracious Irish womanhood.'

'Oh, Mr. O'Ryan!'

As he bowed towards her, she opened her parasol, turning her head modestly aside.

'You seem to think a great deal, Mr. O'Ryan.'

'Do you belave so, madam? Ay, think! If I cud only utther half the thoughts that go surgin' through this brain! But enough iv this!' And then, turning with a lighter air towards her, he continued, 'Yir naice has only lately returned, I hear, madam, from France.'

'The dear child was there two years at school. I was educated there myself when I was young. It is such a comfort to have her back, and it is a heavy responsibility, too!'

She sighed.

'I'm shure iv that,' said he. 'But a risponsibility not beyond you, madam, if I may judge on a short acquaintance iv yir intillectul indowmints.'

She glanced shyly at him.

'You're a dreadful flatterer, Mr. O'Ryan, I'm afraid.'

'Indade, but it's the truth. I've a sort iv naturil gift madam, for discarnin' the mentil powirs in the minds iv others, an' I'm greatly mistaken if I'm not at prisint talkin' to a lady iv unusual education an' great naturil ability.'

She shut her parasol, tapping his shoulder with the handle.

'Oh, I mustn't listen to you, indeed I mustn't,' said she. 'I'm too old, now, for nice speeches, Mr. O'Ryan.'

'Don't do yirsilf an injustice, madam. You're not too ould to be a lady whose convirsation is worth listenin' to.'

'Well, well!' said Miss Hannah, 'it's easy to see you're an Irishman, Mr. O'Ryan.'

'God forbid I was anything else! To be a thrue Irishman, madam, is the great aim iv me life. I trust I'll nivir be so base as to disown me counthry.'

Having reached the farm gates, they passed slowly in. Nora, with Father Pat, soon arrived. As they entered, Nora gave a start, uttering a cry of surprise, which she checked as Father Pat turned to look at her. She had caught sight of Val Blake, who, as he rode by, smiled affectionately and raised his hat. Father Pat observed her blush.

'I hope you don't make free wid that young man?' said he.

'Sir!' said Nora.

'I'm spakin' now as yir priest,' said Father Pat sternly. 'I won't allow you to be foolin' yir time wid a Prodistint.'

'Sure, Father, he never enters my thoughts,' said Nora coaxingly. 'I've something else to do than to be thinking of Mr. Val Blake.'

Father Pat was somewhat reassured.

'Ay, ay,' said he; 'but I've heard an' I know iv his gallavantin', an' let him keep to his own side, I say! There are too many mixed marriages in the counthry already.'

Miss Hannah had prevailed on Mr. O'Ryan to stay to dinner. Father Pat, however, declined, and went home alone.

It was midnight before Mr. O'Ryan returned. As he approached, he saw a light in the room up-stairs. He knocked. In a few moments, Father Pat, putting up the window, thrust out his head.

'Who's there?' he shouted.

'It's me, rivirind sor.'

'It's a nice time to be comin' home to a respectible house!' said Father Pat.

Presently he came shuffling along the hall.

'Come in, in the name iv God,' said he, opening the door.

'I didn't expict to find you waitin' up, rivirind

sor,' observed O'Ryan respectfully, stepping into the hall. 'Where's the menial?'

Father Pat grumbled as he locked the door. He took the candle from the hall table, leading the way upstairs.

'She's aslape in bed,' he replied, 'like all dacent Christians at such times iv the night.'

They entered the room above. The table had a tray with decanter and glasses. Father Pat's arm-chair was before the fire. He had been asleep O'Ryan brightened as he saw the decanter. Putting his head on one side, he said playfully:

'May I, rivirind sor?'

Father Pat, his hand on the back of the chair into which he was about to sink, turned to look at him.

'May you what?'

O'Ryan, smiling, pointed to the decanter.

'Well, I suppose, as it's a cowld night,' said Father Pat grudgingly, 'you may. An' perhaps,' he muttered, letting himself down into the chair, 'it may be yir last in this house.'

O'Ryan filled his glass. Having emptied it, he held it to his breast as he smacked his lips. Grasping both sides of the chair, Father Pat, with his face very red, glanced round.

'Pardin me, yir rivirence,' said Mr. O'Ryan alertly.

He put down his glass to take up Father Pat's.

'I obsarve you have only partially partaken iv yir whisky punch, sor. Permit me, sor, to hand it to you.'

Father Pat took the tumbler, glancing uneasily at his companion, before turning to gaze musingly at the fire.

'It will be a bad day for Ireland, sor,' observed O'Ryan, 'whin the laity forgit their duty to the anointed priests.'

His reverence said nothing in reply. O'Ryan deftly mixed another tumblerful, which he drank behind Father Pat's back. Then, approaching the fireplace, he drew a chair modestly to the wall.

'It's a comfortible house, that iv Farmer Kennedy's, sor,' said he.

'Ay, ay.'

'I thried to make meself agreeable to the ladies, sor. I found thim extramely ginteel an' highly accomplished. The young lady, Miss Nora, is an attractive young woman, sor.'

Father Pat, having finished his tumbler, handed it to O'Ryan.

'Thry another, yir rivirence?'

'Well, well, a small wan, a small wan. Ay,' observed Father Pat, as he lay back in the chair, firmly grasping the arms, 'I'll take care Miss Nora Kennedy doesn't make a fool iv herself.

She'll be the richest heiress in the county, an' as long as she's in me parish, I'll be the guardian iv her morils. I'll do me duty by her. I'll kape an eye on her. A wake foolish girl wid Frinch notions! I tould her father not to sind her to that godless, irreligious counthry. But I might as well be talkin' to the wall. He's a headsthrong man. I'll see that Misther Val Blake or any other Prodistint doesn't fool the wake young cratur.'

O'Ryan, who was standing beside the chair presenting the tumbler, opened his eyes widely.

'D'you mane to say, sor, that Miss Nora has a wakeness for that scion iv the landed gintry?'

Father Pat, as he took the tumbler, looked up.

'Nivir mind what I mane,' said he. 'I'm talkin' now as the appinted guardian iv the morils iv this parish, that's all. It's none iv your bizniss.'

'Pardin me, sor,' said O'Ryan, reseating himself, 'pardin me, yir rivirence, but it *is* me bizness. I've a wakeness for Miss Kennedy meself.'

Father Pat suddenly sat up straight.

'What!' he exclaimed.

O'Ryan raised his hand soothingly.

'Sor,' said he, 'no doubt yir surprised. You think, sor, as the wurruld thinks, that I'm a man iv steel, a man, sor, above the wakeness iv woman's

wiles. But, sor, though I may appear impassive an' cowld to the wurruld, I'm not insinsible to the charrums iv a pretty faymale. An' no sooner had I set eyes on Nora Kennedy than I said to meself: "Ignatius O'Ryan, you've met yir fate; that woman will be yir wife!"'

'Your wife?' cried Father Pat.

'Ay, sor. No doubt,' said O'Ryan gently, 'you will be sorry to lose me. But do not let it affect you, sor. I'll often come to see you whin I'm married to her.'

Father Pat rose.

'Married to her?' he exclaimed. 'Married to the wealthiest girl in the county, an' settled down forninst me for ivir? You spalpeen—you owdacious spalpeen!'

O'Ryan stared with dignified amazement.

'These are hard wurruds, sor,' said he.

'Hard, sor?' shouted Father Pat, working himself into fury. 'Hard d'you say? Git out iv me house, I say!'

O'Ryan, stepping to the table, put down his glass. Then, folding his arms, he gazed haughtily at the priest, who quivered with rage.

'Be careful, sor,' said O'Ryan, growing pale. 'Don't commit yirself.'

'Commit meself? Tare an' ages, here's talk to the priest iv the parish! Ay, ay,' he muttered,

searching with shaking hands in his breast-pocket, 'ay, now's the time !'

O'Ryan waited in scornful silence. Father Pat, at last, producing his pocket-book, threw it on the table.

'There's twinty pounds there for you,' said he.

'Twinty pounds for me ?'

Father Pat pointed to the door.

'Take thim an' lave me for ivir,' said he. 'Go to America. Will you go to America ?'

O'Ryan, taking up the pocket-book, looked in at the notes. He pondered a moment.

'Will you go,' exclaimed Father Pat tremulously, 'an' nivir let me see yir face agin ?'

O'Ryan stood in silence with his eyes cast down.

'Will you go ?' cried Father Pat.

O'Ryan started. He looked up.

'Sor,' said he, 'afther the insults you've haped upon me, me silf-rispict can have only wan answer to yir question. I go, sor. Thankin' you for past favours, I go !'

Thrusting the book into his pocket, he took his hat and umbrella, and, without another word, went away. Father Pat stood staring at the open door, his mouth agape, his upraised hands clenched. He heard O'Ryan go downstairs; he heard him unbolt the front-door. He heard it close behind him. Still attentively listening, he heard the

retreating footsteps gradually die away. Then he shrieked:

'What have I done? God be marciful to me! what have I done?'

He rushed to the window. Throwing it up, he thrust out his head. He gazed down the road.

'O'Ryan!' he cried.

There was no response. The moon was shining through the trees, showing the white road that led to the town.

'Ignatius!' he shouted.

Still there was no reply and no one to be seen. Father Pat, closing the window, staggered to the chair, sinking down with his chin on his breast.

VII.

A CAUTIOUS EDITOR.

THE night being cold, Mr. O'Ryan turned up his coat-collar as he left the house of Father Pat. With his umbrella under his arm, his hands in his pockets, his hat pulled forward, he hurried towards the town. He heard behind the cry of 'O'Ryan!' followed more faintly by 'Ignatius!' He smiled to himself, but went quickly ahead without glancing back. When he entered the main street, he found it deserted. The moon lit the rough thoroughfare and the houses so clearly that he could, if he desired, have counted the stones under his feet or the slates on the roofs. He passed the Court-house in the centre of the market-square. A little further on he wheeled to the right, making straight for the White Horse Hotel. The elm before the coffee-room window stood out without the quiver of a leaf. Through the fanlight over the front-door he saw the glimmer of a lamp. He knocked, then turned briskly to face the street, stamping his

numbed feet as he thrust his cold hands deeper into his pockets. The knock sounded through the street with appalling distinctness. Dogs began to bark in back-yards. In some of the opposite houses lights appeared suddenly, amazed faces being pressed against the windows. Having waited several moments, Mr. O'Ryan put his eye to the keyhole. He saw, in the empty hall, a lamp burning on the small plain table. He knocked again, louder than before. Again the dogs howled defiance and the lights flickered in the opposite houses. After awhile an upper window in the hotel was slowly raised. Mrs. Rafferty, in a white gown with a large frilled nightcap, put out her head.

'What's the matther?' she inquired.

Mr. O'Ryan, looking up, raised his hat.

'Pardin me throublin' you, ma'm,' said he.

'Glory be to God! is it Misther O'Ryan?' she exclaimed.

'Might I have a bed for the night, ma'm, if it isn't inconvanient?'

'Shure an' welcome,' she replied. 'Just excuse me a minit, sor, an' I'll come down meself an' open the door.'

'Pray do not hurry,' he observed.

She closed the window. A protracted interval ensued. He began to feel angry. At length she

unlocked the door, and he stepped impatiently in.

'Troth yir heartily welcome, sor. But, tell me, there's nothin' the matther wid his rivirence?'

She raised her face anxiously as she shot the last bolt in the door. He turned down the collar of his coat before replying.

'Mrs. Rafferty,' said he, 'his rivirence is in the best iv health.'

'The Lord be praised!'

'But,' continued Mr. O'Ryan solemnly, 'there are raisins why it is necessary for me to sleep here for the prisint.'

Her face was contorted with curiosity, but she merely pulled her cloak together at her breast as she nodded.

'Far be i from me, sor, to be inquisitive,' said she. 'It's not for the likes iv me to pry into the affairs iv a gintleman like you, sor.'

He gravely placed his hand on her arm.

'There's no person,' said he, 'in Ballycusha to whom I'd sooner disclose me saycrit affairs——'

'Shure it's proud I am, sor,' interrupted Mrs. Rafferty, emphasizing his every word with a mysterious nod.

He stepped back, folding his arms.

'But, Mrs. Rafferty,' said he, with a suddenness which made her start, 'there are saycrits,

ma'm, which I am not at liberty to disclose even to you.'

'Shure I can quite undherstand, sor.'

'Even to you. An' why? Because they are pilitical saycrits.'

'Just so, sor.'

He raised his right hand.

'Pilitical saycrits, ma'm,' said he, 'iv the highest importinse an deepest import. I will tell you this much, ma'm, for I rispict you.'

She curtsied, smiling.

'Oh, sor, it's kind iv you to say so!'

'No, no,' said he—'oh, no! I am not a man to disguise me sintimints; an', as I say, Father Pat an' I have had a slight disagraymint on a minor matther iv some pilitical importinse; nothin' more, ma'm, I asshure you. It may be arranged or it may not. Time will tell. Is the bar open, ma'm?'

Being stout, she disliked the exertion of opening the bar, which was, of course, closed; but for a gentleman of so engaging a personality she felt it a duty to inconvenience herself.

'Well, sor, iv coorse it's locked up, but if you wish it, I——'

'No, no!' he exclaimed. 'Not for me, ma'm; you shall not inconvanience yirself in the laste.'

'Och, shure, it's no inconvanience at all, Misther O'Ryan. It won't take me a minit.'

'Pardin me, Mrs. Rafferty, I have disturbed yir well-earned repose. I shall not further trespass on yir good nature. If, widout openin' the bar, you could find me a little iv yir excillint whisky, for, indade, ma'm, me mind has bin overworked. I can think'—he spread his hands on his brows—'on many problims, but there is a limit to the greatest intillict!'

She was moved to motherliness by his troubled aspect.

'Bedad, an' I'll get you a rale good dhrop!' said she.

'But the throuble?' he called after her.

'No throuble in the wurruld, sor!' she replied, half-way down the stairs.

Whilst waiting, he paced the hall, his arms folded, his brows knit. Once or twice he started, looking up at the ceiling to say 'Ha!' before resuming his walk.

Mrs. Rafferty came puffing from the bar; a bottle in one hand, a bunch of keys in the other. He politely relieved her of the bottle.

'I thank you,' said he; 'I shall not forget this kindness. I nivir forgit a kind deed or the face iv a frind. It may be a mere matther iv sintimint, but, then, I'm a man iv sintimint. Might I ask you, Mrs. Rafferty, the cost iv this excillint establishmint?'

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He looked round the hall. She was sitting down to recover breath, her hands spread on her knees.

'The cost, sor?' she repeated, surprised.

Slipping the bottle into his breast-pocket, he looked down generously at the landlady, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat.

'In case,' he explained, 'in case, Mrs. Rafferty, you were anxious to be rid iv the heavy risponsibility an' desired to retire into privit' life.'

'Shure, sor,' said she anxiously, 'I hope no one in the town has bin spreadin' such reports?'

'No! Oh dear no!' He held up his hand, then returned his thumb to the armhole. 'I merely threw it out as a suggestion; nothing more, I assure you, ma'm. But I was just thinkin' it over, an' if ivir you are desirous, ma'm, iv retirin', I hope you'll give me the refusil iv the place. That's all! Merely a momintary notion crossin' me brain.'

'Shure, sor,' said she, rising, 'there's no one I'd sooner give the ould place to, but——'

'Yir hand on it, ma'm,' he exclaimed. 'In the good ould Irish fashin, yir hand on it!'

'Musha, there it is,' said Mrs. Rafferty, grinning, 'an' the best iv good luck, sor!'

'Bravo! There's nothin', afther all, ma'm, like the spontaynious ginirosity iv the thrue Irish heart! I've thravelled a good dale, ma'm, in me time; but I nivir yit found hearts so thrue as those that bate

over the green sod iv ould Ireland. An' now, ma'm, be yir lave, I'd like to go to me bed.'

Anxious to return to her babes, she led the way with alacrity. On the first landing she paused to thrust open a door.

'There, sor, is the room. You'll find a candle an' matches inside, an' good clane sheets on the bed, for it's a dacent good cratur does the landry.'

'I thank you,' said he, holding out his hand again. 'You'll excuse me, Mrs. Rafferty, for the throuble I'm givin'; an' I'm sure you'll be glad to resoom yir slumbirs, for I know that you'll have the house full now that the fair's comin'.'

'Shure, indade, that's thrue, sor. I'm always pretty full durin' the fair time. But up to the prisint there's no one in the house only Misther Kelly the editor.'

He turned as he was about to enter the room.

'The editor?' he repeated.

'Iv the *Vindicathor*,' said Mrs. Rafferty.

He put the tip of his forefinger to his forehead.

'Oh, ay. Ti be shure, ti be shure,' said he. 'Iv coorse I've heard iv him. I hope to mate him in the mornin', ma'm; an' if you see him, you may tell him I'm here.'

'Very well, sor. Good-night, sor, an' plisint dhrames!'

'The same to you, ma'm, an' you desarve thim!'

It was late next morning when O'Ryan went downstairs. He entered the coffee-room, where he found a heavily-built man with his feet in the fender. This man was the only occupant of the room. Mr. O'Ryan scrutinized the preparations for breakfast on the table, then, looking at the man's back, he coughed. The man turned round to stare. He showed a heavy face, a bushy head and beard of red hair, with small eyes.

'I think, sor,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, 'if I'm not greatly mistaken, I see before me the able an' gifted editor iv the *Vindicator*?'

Mr. Kelly, who prided himself on acuteness, was fond of referring to himself as a man of the world. He was always on his guard, but the quiet dignity of Mr. O'Ryan rather threw him off it.

'Me name's Kelly,' said he, placing the paper on his knees to take off his spectacles, which he slowly wiped in the tail of his coat, 'an' I'm the editor iv the *Vindicator*.'

'I suppose you know who I am?' said Mr. O'Ryan.

Mr. Kelly looked through his spectacles, then breathed on them.

'Faith then, an' I don't!' he replied.

Mr. O'Ryan drew a chair to the fireplace.

'I presoom, Misther Kelly,' said he, 'you've

heard the name Ignatius O'Ryan pretty freely iv late?'

Mr. Kelly looked hard at him.

'Well, to be honist,' said he, 'I haven't.'

'You have not, sor?' said Mr. O'Ryan severely.

'No.'

Mr. O'Ryan sat back in his chair to laugh silently, Mr. Kelly staring at him with guarded surprise. Mr. O'Ryan, abruptly standing up, slapped him on the back.

'You're a clivir man, Misther Kelly,' said he. 'I've heard it, sor, of'en in the city; but I nivir knew it for a fact till this moment. Mr. Kelly, you will brekfist wid me, sor?'

The sudden severity of Mr. O'Ryan's manner again threw Mr. Kelly off his guard.

'Well, I don't mind if I do,' he replied hesitatingly.

Mr. O'Ryan instantly pulled the bell rope.

'Then, sor,' said he, 'that's somethin' like thrue Irish heartiness.'

William the waiter entered, a napkin on his arm. He was a trembling old man in threadbare black clothes, his shirt-front besmeared with greasy finger-marks.

'Brekfist, Willyim, for two.'

'Yis, sor!'

'Stay!' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan, raising his hand

to arrest William's exit. 'Not the ord'nary brekfist, Willyim.'

'Not the ord'nary brekfist. No, sor.'

'Stay!' repeated Mr. O'Ryan as William turned again. 'When I said not the ord'nary brekfist, I mane that you are to put the lardher iv this excillint hotel to the test.'

'To the test. Yes, sor, I undherstand, sor. To the test.'

'Pardin me, Willyim,' said Mr. O'Ryan gently, 'you do not understand. Be good enough to wait a momint.' He turned graciously to the editor. 'I presoom, Mr. Kelly, you'd like a toothsum slice iv ham an' a chicken; or perhaps yir taste runs in the direction iv a delikit piece iv roast beef?'

'Troth, I'm not over-partikler, so long's I get enough,' returned Mr. Kelly; 'an' whatever it is, I hope it won't be long comin'.'

Right, sor!' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'Now, Willyim, you hear? Ham, chickin, roast beef, tay an' toast, an' whatever else you may have. An', Willyim!'

'Yis, sor,' said William, turning again with trained patience.

'Be expidishus!' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'Whativir you bring, bring it expidishusly!'

Mr. Kelly, putting on his spectacles, resumed his paper to show that he was not won by an invitation to breakfast. Mr. O'Ryan, remarking

easily on the fineness of the weather, strolled to the window, where he tapped idly on the glass. From time to time, Mr. Kelly, compressing his lips, glanced over his spectacles at his companion's back. Once or twice Mr. O'Ryan turned; but Mr. Kelly, though curious, was quick enough to become suddenly interested in his reading.

Presently Mr. O'Ryan started so palpably that Mr. Kelly looked up without disguise.

'You'll excuse me, sor, one moment,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, pausing in his walk to the door. 'In the manetime, I will take it as a persinil favour not to wait brekfist, in case I'm a thrifle late.'

'Sartinly not,' replied Mr. Kelly gruffly.

When Mr. O'Ryan was gone, Mr. Kelly put his paper on the floor, took off his spectacles, rubbed them on his sleeve, and put them on again as he walked stealthily to the window. Concealing himself in the folds of the curtain, he looked out. He saw the thin figure of Mr. O'Ryan tacking swiftly across the street, his tall hat on the back of his head, his coat-tails flapping with the rapidity of his movements. He further observed him hurry towards Tim Cassidy, the bully of Ballycusha. Mr. O'Ryan, slapping Cassidy familiarly on the shoulder, walked with him until they reached a public-house, into which they both disappeared. Mr. Kelly watched these proceedings with astonished

eyes until someone coughed significantly behind him, when, turning, he saw Mrs. Rafferty helping William to lay the breakfast-table.

'Well, Misther Kelly,' said Mrs. Rafferty, 'you seem greatly interestid in the view.'

Mr. Kelly came forward.

'I was lookin' afther our frind, Misther O'Ryan,' said he. 'That's a very mystarious man, Mrs. Rafferty.'

'What's mystarious about him?' she inquired sharply.

'Well, well,' said he, 'I didn't mane to say anything insultin'. There's somethin' mystarious about him, that's all.'

'He's only mystarious to thim that's mystarious thimselves,' said Mrs. Rafferty, with so significant a look that Mr. Kelly shrunk into the nearest chair, scratching his cheek apologetically. 'He's a rale gintleman, ivry inch,' she continued. 'Willyim, another knife an' fork. A rale gintleman, wid a good heart an' an open hand. An' what he thinks he says straight out like a man. There's not a mane dhrop in his blood, anyhow!'

She gave a last glance over the table before leaving Mr. Kelly alone to ruminate.

VIII.

UNREQUITED LOVE.

MR. O'RYAN soon returned, with apologies for delay. Mr. Kelly, taking a seat opposite at the breakfast-table, began to feel that habitual cautiousness might be relaxed before a man who had won the esteem of such a woman as Mrs. Rafferty. Both men made rapid progress with breakfast.

'Mrs. Rafferty has bin praisin' you, sor, behind yir back,' observed Mr. Kelly.

'A good sowl!' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'A fine figir iv a woman, sor, an' a charmin' hostiss! I hope, sor, you will jine me in dhrinkin' her health later on? She is an admirable specimin, sor, iv the thrue Irish matron.'

'She sames partial to you,' observed Mr. Kelly, endeavouring to smother his jealousy with a slice of ham.

'Ha, ha!' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'Well, well! I belave, sor, that woman ud go through fire an' wather to sarve me.'

'Troth, you're to be envied,' said Mr. Kelly savagely.

Mr. O'Ryan stared across his upraised tea-cup.

'There's nothin' sarious, me good sor,' said he; 'merely honest Irish frindship. But let that pass,' he added gravely. 'I've too importint bizness in hand, sor, to spind time in the dallyin' pursoot iv love. You've heard, sor, iv the little diffirince I've had wid his rivirence, Father Murphy?'

Undesirous of appearing profoundly ignorant, Mr. Kelly muttered something to the effect that he had heard a rumour of the kind.

Mr. O'Ryan, leaning his arm on the table, bent forward impressively.

'Misther Kelly, sor,' said he, 'you're a clivir man, sor. No, no!'—raising his hand as Mr. Kelly cautiously scowled—'I don't mane to flatther you, sor. You're welcum to me as an inimy or as a friend, whichivir you plase. But as a matther iv fact, sor, you're a man iv thried intilligince an' expariance. I've heard iv you, sor, in the Irish methropolis; an' what I desire to impress on you is this: You've the instincts iv the thrue journalist. Now, sor, whativir you may hear relatin' to any little disagreement his rivirence an' I may have had, be cautious, sor, how you dale wid it in the *Vindi-*

cator. I think, sor, you're a cautious man, or I'm much mistaken ?'

'I hope I am,' said Mr. Kelly.

An' a man iv the wurruld ?'

'Troth, you've hit it !' said Mr. Kelly.

'Very good, sor.' Mr. O'Ryan, taking up a knife, tapped the handle on the table to emphasize his words. 'Whin you dale wid this bizness, this tempory rupture—mind, sor, I say tempory—betwane his rivirence an' meself, you can say, sor, from the fountin-head, that it was a mere matther iv detail. Not iv principle. A matther iv detail. In the matther iv giniral principle, Father Murphy an' meself are agrade.'

Mr. O'Ryan, sitting back in his chair, folded his arms as he nodded solemnly several times across the table. Mr. Kelly looked mystified.

'But——' he began.

'One moment, sor !' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan. 'In the matther, sor, iv the pilitical divilipmint iv Ballycusha an'——' Mr. O'Ryan paused: gazing round the room, he rose stealthily to close the door; resuming his seat, he lowered his voice—'in the matther, sor, iv the establishmint iv a Ballycusha branch iv the National Lague——'

Laying down his knife and fork, Mr. Kelly sat upright, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

'In these matthers, sor,' continued Mr. O'Ryan, bringing down his fist softly on the table, 'the rispicted parish priest an' meself are agrade. But, sor, we have details to arrange, an' there a slight diffirince arose. Father Pat, sor, is not bould enough. An' you, sor, are not bould enough.'

'Me?' ejaculated Mr. Kelly.

'Yis, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan sternly. 'Let me tell you, sor, that we've bin watchin' the *Vindicator* in the Irish methropolis, an' we considher, sor, that the coorse you've taken during racent events is not bould enough. I may tell you, sor—an' I spake to you now as a frind—there's talk in the methropolis, sor, iv runnin' a paper agin the *Vindicator* if you don't put more backbone into it.'

'Bedad, sor, this is the first——'

'Now, sor,' interrupted Mr. Ryan severely, 'you're a clivir man an' can take a hint. An' let me tell you, sor, there's such a thing as bein' too cautious—especially, sor, durin' the prisint crisis, whin the movement that is spreadin' through the country is rachin' a climax. The time has come, sor, for ivry thrue Irishman to take his stand aythir for the movement or aginst it; an' I spake wid authority whin I tell you that the *Vindicator* will have to decide one way or another within the nixt few days.'

He was interrupted by the noise of a crowd approaching the hotel with cries of 'O'Ryan!'

'What's that?' exclaimed Mr. Kelly, starting up.

Mr. O'Ryan, gravely rising, placed his hand paternally on the other's shoulder.

'Sor,' said he, 'in what I've said, be plazed to rimimber that I spake to you as a frind, manin' you nothin' but yir own good an' the advancement iv the *Vindicator*.'

There were again cries of 'O'Ryan!' The noise growing louder, indicated that the crowd had reached the front-door of the hotel.

'You hear the voice iv the people,' said Mr. O'Ryan, raising a warning finger. 'Rimimber! An' now, sor,' he added, leading the way, 'I'd be glad if you'd accompany me to the hall. It's ividint the people won't be satisfied till they see me.'

He went out; Mr. Kelly, profoundly mystified, following at his heels.

Around the steps of the hotel there was a small but noisy crowd, consisting of the idlers of the town with a score of small boys who had been gathered by Tim Cassidy. This person, his red neckcloth tied in a wisp, a big blackthorn in his hand, shouted himself hoarse when Mr. O'Ryan appeared. Every person in the crowd, being afraid of Cassidy, followed his example. Mr. O'Ryan, making a step from the door, solemnly raised his hand.

'Silence!' roared Cassidy, flourishing his stick.

'People iv Ballycusha!' exclaimed O'Ryan. He extended his arms, and then dropped them with hands clenched to his side. 'I thank you! I thank you, me frinds, from the bottim iv me heart, for this spontaynious assimbly, because it is proof that the heart iv Ballycusha is sound, an' bates in unisin wid the throbbin' pulses iv the mother counthry. Let no man say, afther this dimonstrashun, that Ballycusha is aslape, that Ballycusha refuses to dhrop into line wid the rest iv the counthry that's marchin' on to vict'ry. For meself, let me say, I see be the anxiety on the faces around me, that you've bin throubled be the diffirince that has taken place betwane me an' the rispicted parish priest. Me frinds, a cheer for Father Pat!'

'Hooray!' yelled Cassidy. The crowd obediently hurrayed.

'People iv Ballycusha,' resumed Mr. O'Ryan, 'the diffirince betwane his rivirence an' meself is not, thank God, a matther iv principle, but one iv detail; an' before the sun sets behind the Cusha hills I hope an' belave that that diffirince, slight as it is, will have saised to exist. Belave me, in Father Pat an' meself you have laiders who will nivir promise anything to you we are not prepared to fulfil; we will kape the grand ould flag iv fraidum flyin', come fair weather or foul. Frinds, I thank

you agin from the bottim iv me heart, an', belave me, to me dyin' day I'll not forgit this spontaynious movemint iv affection you've displayed this mornin'. An' before I go I'll take the liberty iv throwin' the price iv a few swates to the little min I see on the outskirts iv this dimonstrashun !'

He threw a handful of small change, for which both men and boys fought, on the ground. Mr. Kelly had been standing in the background mutely astonished. Mr. O'Ryan took his arm, and at that moment Mrs. Rafferty came through the hall to meet them.

'Well, Mrs. Rafferty,' said Mr. O'Ryan, who was in excellent spirits.

'Well, sor,' said she. 'That was a grate spache intirely. Shure, it's a rale trate to hear you talk.'

'Come, come. You see this woman?' said Mr. O'Ryan. Taking her by the shoulder, he turned to Mr. Kelly, who suddenly looked at the ceiling. 'This, sor, is a specimin iv the thrue Irishwoman, sor. Hansum, substanshil, an' as kind as she is good. Kape yir eye on this woman, Misther Kelly. Make a modil iv her, sor. Set her up, sor, as a type an' a specimint. Whinivir, sor, you're at a loss to discribe the thrue Irishwoman in all her vartuous perfictions, conjure up, sor, before yir mind the ample yet shapely proporshins iv this charmin' faymale. Ha! ha! That blush becomes you,

ma'm. Well, Mrs. Rafferty,' he dropped into genial conversation, 'orathry is dhry work. Misther Kelly here is goin' to thrate me to a glass iv wather wid a dash iv whisky in it.'

As the blushes died from her forehead, Mrs. Rafferty smoothed her swelling apron.

'Thin, sor,' said she, 'I hope, sor, you'll have a nice quiet sate in me own sittin'-room. It's not a gintleman like you, sor, that should be standin' at the public bar.'

'I thank you,' returned Mr. O'Ryan. He laid his hand on Mr. Kelly's shoulder. 'May this ready writer come wid me? Has he your gracious permission, ma'm, to sit in yir privit sittin'-room?'

'In coorse, sor,' replied Mrs. Rafferty, ignoring Mr. Kelly's presence, 'if you desire to bring him I'll make no objection.'

'Ha, ha! That is spoken wid thrue Irish hospitality. Misther Kelly, sor, this way. Ladies first. We must kape the modil always before us!'

Mr. Kelly brought up the rear. He was despondent: so far he had made no advance in Mrs. Rafferty's estimation. They traversed the dark narrow passage until she ushered them into a little room beside the kitchen. Here there was a worn carpet, a centre table, several chairs, and a window which looked on the back-yard. Mrs. Rafferty,

who brought the drink with her own hands, shut the door, leaving the gentlemen to themselves.

Mr. O'Ryan, tilting back his chair, placed his heels on the mantel-board. He hummed a cheerful air, occasionally taking a mouthful from the glass beside his elbow, Mr. Kelly, on the opposite side of the table, gloomily gazing down into his tumbler.

'I hope, sor,' observed Mr. O'Ryan as he raised his glass, 'you will do justice to to-day's dimonstrashun—that you will rise to the occasion.'

'Ay, ay,' said Mr. Kelly morosely.

'You can mintion, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'that the burnin' words iv the Thribune may yet be heard in the British House iv Commins, hurlin' the wrongs iv Ireland in the teeth iv her heriditary foes. You can go on like that, sor. I naden't suggist ideas to a man iv your intillict.'

Mr. Kelly, resting his forehead in the palm of his right hand, sighed deeply. Mr. O'Ryan looked quickly at him.

'What's the matter, frind?' asked Mr. O'Ryan with apparent anxiety. 'Is the whisky not to yir likin'?'

'It's not that,' replied Mr. Kelly.

Drawing forth a handful of gold and silver, Mr. O'Ryan shook it.

'Thin, sor, is it money matthers?' he asked.

'I'm not wealthy, sor, but I have a thrifle. If the loan iv a few——'

Mr. Kelly looked up.

'It's not that,' said he. 'But since you've shown yirself so ginirous, it wud be mane iv me to thrate you otherwise than as a frind.'

'I thank you,' said Mr. O'Ryan.

Mr. Kelly drew his chair nearer.

'I'll tell you frankly, sor,' said he, 'that whin I met you first I was, perhaps, inclined to be a thrifle over-cautious.'

Mr. O'Ryan waved his hand.

'Throw caution to the winds, sor. I'm above-boord.'

'I belave it,' returned Mr. Kelly. 'An' now, sor,' drawing his chair closer, 'you saw that woman, sor?'

'Our good hostiss?'

'Ay,' replied Mr. Kelly, dropping his voice. 'I've coorted that woman, sor, cautiously since her husband died, an' I don't same a bit nearer than I was a year ago. Sor, I don't want yir money, but if you cud spake a good wurrud for me——'

Mr. O'Ryan took his feet from the mantel-board. He stretched a hand to his friend across the table.

'Take that hand, sor,' he said impressively.

Mr. Kelly took it.

'Is it, sor,' asked Mr. O'Ryan sternly, 'the hand iv a man?'

'I think,' replied Mr. Kelly, 'it is a man's hand.'

'Thin, sor, say no more. Cheer up, me frind! You shall win Mrs. Rafferty! I promise you I'll dance at yir weddin', sor, within three months; an' I nivir made a promise I nivir fulfilled. Do we undherstand aich other, sor?'

'There are two sides to that question, Misther O'Ryan!' exclaimed Mrs. Rafferty, who, with napkin in hand, had entered unobserved. 'I'm very much obliged to you for givin' me away offhand, but you'll allow me, sor, to have a word in the matther.'

Mr. Kelly jumped up affrightedly. Mr. O'Ryan, turning to Mrs. Rafferty, said banteringly:

'Come, come, Mrs. Rafferty, there's no harrum in a bit iv a joke.'

'It may be a joke to you, sor,' said Mrs. Rafferty, raising her voice as she glanced contemptuously at Mr. Kelly, who began to move cautiously towards the door. 'But I'll make bould to tell you I wouldn't take that scraneen, not for a mint iv money! I often gave him the hint not to be comin' here, an' I now tell him—— Ay, there he goes, snaykin' out iv the room! Take that, you spalpeen!'

With a dexterous movement Mr. Kelly disappeared through the door as Mrs. Rafferty's duster struck the panels.

IX.

NORA'S OLD NURSE, MARTHA.

MORNING had dawned an hour before Father Pat, rousing himself from his trance of remorse, crept upstairs to bed. Though feverish, he at length fell into a deep sleep, from which he did not waken until mid-day. When he went downstairs, he found old Martha rearranging the breakfast-table for the fifth time. Anxious as she appeared, she was serenity compared with Father Pat, whose shoulders were rounded, his chin on his breast, the folds of his coat gathered in the clasp of his nervous hands. He stumbled as he entered, then, pacing slowly to the hearth, he gazed down into the grate. Martha rattled a spoon against a saucer, but he did not turn. She noisily moved the plate of rashers from one side to the other, but he remained in dejected silence.

'I thought you'd nivir wake, yir rivirence,' said she. 'I knocked three times at yir door.'

Facing slowly round, he stared at her a moment in silence.

'Are you there?' said he dreamily. 'I didn't see you.'

'Won't you sate yirsilf now, yir rivirence,' said she, 'an' thry a swate bit iv ham an' some new-laid eggs? Shure, it's starvin' wid the hunger you must be.'

'I cudn't ate a morsil to save me life. He's gone! Ignatius O'Ryan's gone!'

Clasping her hands, the old woman looked up.

'Thin the Lord be praised!' she exclaimed. 'I thought he'd nivir show the welcum sight iv his back, the wicked thafe iv the wurruld!'

Her expressions of joy were abruptly disconcerted by Father Pat, who, striding across the room, seized her by the shoulder, at the same time glaring into her startled face.

'Woman!' he exclaimed, 'brathe another wurrud aginst that man, an' I'll—I'll——'

At a loss for a threat, he stared wildly about. She trembled.

'An' what, yir rivirence?'

'I'd refuse you absilooshin if you were lyin' on yir dyin' bed this minit.'

He stepped back to glare at her from a new perspective. As she put a shaking hand on the table to steady herself, her face turned ashen.

'Glory be to God, yir rivirence ud nivir do that!'

He tucked up his coat-tails to sit down at the table.

'Ay, would I,' he said fiercely. 'Say a wurrud in me harin' agin that man, an' you'll die a pagan. A grand man, woman! A great man—an intillict an' a readiness iv spache which was rale janius!'

Pouring out a cup of tea, he drank a deep mouthful. As he laid down the cup, he looked up.

'A rale janius, he was,' said he.

'Well, yir rivirence knows best,' she submissively responded.

In the act of lifting the cover from the plate of rashers and eggs, he paused with an air of sudden recollection.

'You were nivir rispictful to him, woman. I hope you're satisfied now that you helped to dhrive him out of the house?'

'Shure, yir rivirence is takin' it to heart,' said Martha. 'It's quare that you should be so put out, an' he nothin' in the wurruld to you at all, at all.'

He laid down his knife and fork, his face purple.

'Lave me sight, woman!' he shouted. 'How dar you stand talkin' there to yir priest? Away wid you!'

The old woman, frightened by his menacing manner, hurried out of the room, her under-jaw working more restlessly than ever.

Father Pat continued his breakfast, but ate little. When he had finished he pushed back his chair. With his fingers interlaced across his chest, he sat meditatively shaking his head at intervals. Hearing the sound of wheels, he rose, hoping that Ignatius had returned. Hastening to the window, he saw a pony phaeton halt at the gate. Miss Hannah, followed by her niece Nora, dismounted.

'Shure, it's not thim gossipin' faymales I want to see in me throuble!' he muttered angrily.

He heard the excited voices of the women, followed by the hearty kiss which Nora gave to her old nurse, Martha, and then he sat down wearily.

'Father Pat,' said Miss Hannah, when she entered, 'you're not looking well.'

'I'm not well,' he groaned.

'Dear, dear, I'm so sorry. What is the matter?'

'Nothin'.'

She drew a chair near to him, anxiously scrutinizing his face whilst he sat motionless, staring at the wall. Nora stood at the window, drumming her fingers on the panes.

'And how is your friend, Mr. O'Ryan?' inquired Miss Hannah.

'Well, I hope.'

'I am so glad to hear it. He is such a nice person.'

'Ay, ay.'

'Is he'—asked Miss Hannah falteringly—'is he at home?'

He looked at her.

'He's gone!' he exclaimed.

'Gone?'

'For ivir!'

Father Pat's arms fell to his sides. Miss Hannah's face became suffused, her eyes filling with tears.

As this was a spectacle which invariably infuriated Nora, she felt that she must either leave the room or shake her aunt violently. She left the room. Stealing downstairs, she entered the kitchen on tiptoe, smiling. She went a step forward, pausing as she saw old Martha sitting before the fire, rocking herself to and fro with an apron over her face. Hurrying to the fireplace, Nora knelt down beside the old woman, grasping the withered hands in her warm fingers.

'Nursie dear, what's the matter?'

'Ochone, ochone!' groaned the old woman, rocking herself more emphatically.

'Oh, take down your apron, nursie dear,' said Nora caressingly, and she gently removed the apron, disclosing Martha's face convulsed with grief, her eyes running with tears. 'Oh, what have they been doing to you?' cried Nora indignantly.

'Nothin', chicken. It's only yir poor owld nurse's folly. Ochone! ochone!'

'No, nursie,' exclaimed Nora energetically. 'Don't tell me! You don't cry like that for nothing. Do stop crying!'

Old Martha rocked herself again, attempting to put the apron over her face, an effort which Nora tenderly frustrated. Then, as Nora gazed at the sorrow-stricken face a moment, her own eyes blazed. Jumping to her feet, she glared round at the glittering dish-covers on the wall.

'I'll find it out!' she cried, stamping her foot. 'The cowards! Killing my nursie,' she added, relapsing into sorrow—'killing my poor, good old nursie by inches.'

Drawing a little stool close to Martha's side, she laid her head down in the old woman's lap, with her cheek resting on Martha's hands. For several moments neither spoke. Nora, her head pillowed on the old hands, gazed dimly into the fire; Martha sighed once or twice, obliterating the heavy ticking of the hall clock. Nora at length looked up coaxingly.

'Nursie dear,' said she, 'won't you tell me what makes you so sad? Do, nursie!'

Suddenly grasping Nora's hands, Martha cried:

'Oh, me darlin', I cudn't, I cudn't! Shure, he wouldn't give me absilooshun if I braythed a wurrud. An' shure, a poor owld woman must think iv her sowl. Oh, wurra, wurra, shure I thought I'd be safe for

the next wurruld if I indid me days undher the roof iv the priest; but, shure, I dunno what's come over his rivirence at all, at all. Mavourneen,' she added, starting violently, 'what's that?'

Nora, tightening her hands on the old woman's, gazed sadly at the startled eyes.

'What's what, dear?'

'Hush!' said Martha, listening. Then, resuming her mournful tone: 'Och, shure, I thought it was his step, darlin', an' the heart lept into me mouth.'

'Whose step, nursie?'

'That man's,' replied old Martha, speaking as if the words were choking her. 'That thafe iv the wurruld, O'Ryan! But there,' stroking Nora's hair, 'I daren't say a wurrud, for me sowl's not me own undher this roof. It's well an' fine you're lookin', honey, glory be to God!'

Nora heard her aunt coming down stairs.

'Nursie,' said she quickly, 'will you come over and see me to-morrow?'

'I can't go to-morra, kitten.'

'Well, the day after?'

'Nor the day afther, dearie. I'll go, however, plase God, soon, for if I don't me heart 'll break.'

'Oh, don't say that. Don't talk like that!' cried Nora, wiping her eyes. 'But come and see me quickly, nursie, for this sort of thing I will not allow—no, not for fifty Father Pats!'

'Hush, hush, dearie!'

The old woman raised her hand.

'I'll tell him so to his face!' said Nora indignantly. 'What do I care? Let me tell you, nursie, I haven't lived in France two years for nothing.'

'No, chicken.'

Old Martha, stroking the girl's hair, gazed fondly at the flushed face.

'And I'll pay them out,' said Nora firmly, as she rose, 'if they don't mind themselves. Good-bye now, nursie. There, give me a kiss.'

She threw her arms vigorously round her nurse's neck. Martha, taking Nora's hand, pressed it between her palms.

'God bless you, me darlin' child,' said she. 'God bless yir purty swate face.'

Leaving the kitchen, Nora met her aunt in the hall.

'Are you ready?' she asked shortly.

'Yes, dear,' replied her aunt, letting down her veil. 'Won't you run up and say good-bye to Father Pat?'

'No, I won't,' said Nora, opening the front-door.

'Good gracious, why not?' exclaimed her aunt.

'Because I don't choose.'

'But, my dear child,' said her aunt nervously,

'that is very disrespectful to the priest of the parish.'

'I don't care if he was priest of fifty parishes!' exclaimed Nora loudly. 'And if you won't come, you may stay here with him, if you are so fond of him.'

'Oh, my dear child, what dreadful words!'

Miss Hannah hurried after her niece, who was already half-way down the garden-path.

Releasing the pony's reins, which she had knotted on the railing, Nora stepped swiftly into the trap. Her aunt more carefully followed.

'Dear me, wait a bit,' said Miss Hannah, as Nora seized the whip. 'There's Father Pat in the window.'

'I hope he'll fall out,' said Nora.

Her aunt collapsed against the seat.

'Nora!' she gasped. Nora, breathing hard, with her teeth clenched, whipped the pony into a rapid pace. 'Nora,' said her aunt, 'I don't understand you.'

'No, and you never will, so don't waste your time.'

'Dear me, you're very strange. I must say you are very disrespectful to Father Pat, who has lost his dear friend, Mr. O'Ryan.'

Nora pulled up the pony.

'Aunt,' she cried, 'if you mention that man's

name to me, I'll upset you into the ditch. There!'

Miss Hannah collapsed again. Nora, with set face, sat rigid, driving the pony at its fastest. No further word was spoken until they reached the farm-gates.

X.

THE FAIR OF BALLYCUSHA.

THE Ballycusha fair was held outside the town in a large field surrounded with a low wall. The higgling had ceased at two o'clock. Droves of live stock had passed in and out until the entrance was an expanse of mud through which the carts made deep ruts. As near the gates as the police permitted, card-sharpers plied their trade. Here, too, began the booths, with a counter formed by three boards supported on barrels, displaying for sale hand-knit socks, bright shawls, rings, crucifixes, bracelets, necklaces. Several stands for vending gingerbread with non-alcoholic drinks were patronized by excited boys and girls. There were shooting-galleries with targets which no person ever seemed to hit, least of all those who aimed with precision. Towards the centre of the fair ground stood the drinking-booths, crowded with shouting customers. At the upper end an old door served as a dancing-floor. Beside it sat the

fiddler, a willing victim to continual offers of drink. The common ambition of the man and woman dancing was to dance each other down. Sometimes the man divested himself of coat and vest; his partner took off her shawl, grasping a large handkerchief, with which she wiped her hot face.

Throughout the fair, persons in ordinary conversation talked to the full extent of their lungs. Men shouted, women yelled with laughter, boys and girls voiced their excitement in shrieks, children and babies cried bitterly, amidst the noise of clinking glasses, toy trumpets, whistles, and fiddles. The silent observers were members of the constabulary, good-humouredly pushing their way through the throng.

In one of the booths stood Mr. O'Ryan, his tall hat pushed back from his brows. He leant against the counter, his right arm resting on it, a tumbler close to his elbow. Beside him was Mr. Kelly, whose habitual caution had not been proof against frequent refreshments throughout the day. The barman, in his shirt-sleeves, was busy behind the counter; his wife, sitting on a barrel in the corner, took the money, which she slipped into an enormous pocket under her tucked-up dress. In the upper end of the tent, where dancing proceeded, men held their sweethearts on their knees,

struggling with them for kisses, while the girls playfully shrieked. A stream of people went continuously in and out.

'It is such a scene, sor, as this,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, 'which makes a man fale proud iv bein' a thrue Irishman. Sor, the warrum outgushin's iv the Irish heart were nivir more apparint than at the prisint momint. Do you take me, editor?'

Mr. Kelly struck the counter.

'I'll say this,' he responded, 'I've a great rispict for you, sor. You expriss yir idays to great purpuss.'

'Permit me,' said Mr. O'Ryan. Taking up the editor's empty glass, he turned to the perspiring barman. 'Misther Rooney,' said he, 'the same agin, sor, if you plaze. Yis, sor,' he continued to his friend, 'there are occasions whin a man, even iv the gratest intillict, may let himself go. He may jine in the revelries, and if there's a thrue Irishman about, say so widout resarve. Do you take me, editor?'

'May I shake hands wid you, thinker an' politician that y' are?' asked Mr. Kelly servilely.

Mr. O'Ryan, taking the editor's hand between his palms, squeezed it affectionately.

'I thank you,' said he; 'I shall not forgit this, sor. I may move in other scenes an' visit distant places, but I shall rimimber this moment. It

does honour to yir heart, sor. I'll take the liberty iv sayin', sor, that you have an Irish heart. Have you an Irish heart, editor iv the *Vindicator*?'

Laying his face on the counter, Mr. Kelly burst into tears.

'I have,' he replied.

'Steady,' said Mr. O'Ryan, putting his hand kindly on his friend's bowed shoulder. 'I rispict this emotion, sor. I am in a manner grateful for it. I take it to meself. For God's sake, Misther Kelly, don't make a child iv me before the people! They look up to me, sor. I must not be wake before the eyes iv the people.'

Mr. O'Ryan conquered his feelings sufficiently to help himself to a fresh tumbler of whisky.

'Are you betther, editor?' he asked, after a moment.

'Give over callin' me editor!' exclaimed Mr. Kelly, with such unexpected ferocity that Mr. O'Ryan quickly moved a pace back. 'You nadent let the wurruld know me bizniss!' added Mr. Kelly, raising his voice. 'I'm not ashamed iv me prifession.'

'Be heaven, I should think not!' said Mr. O'Ryan, advancing generously with outstretched hands. 'The noblist prifession, sor, in the universe.'

'Then lave it alone,' observed Mr. Kelly

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morosely ignoring the proffered hands. 'It'll stand be itself. Don't prop it up.'

'Am I a dog, Kelly?' said Mr. O'Ryan severely.

'No, you're not.'

'If I am, kick me!' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan. 'I say, sor, if I am, disthroy me, wipe me out!'

'Don't snap a man up,' said Mr. Kelly.

'No, before heaven! Kelly, you'll dhrink wid me? Do me the honour, sor—obsarve, the honour—to dhrink wid me. Glass agin glass, sor, in the thrue Irish fashion. Yir health! I dhrink, sor, to yir long life an' prosperity.'

Mr. Kelly accepted the challenge. When they had clinked glasses and drank, he produced a small black pipe which he slowly filled with tobacco, eventually lighting it after several attempts to set fire to his beard. Mr. O'Ryan, his back to the counter, his hands in his pockets, alternately smiled and frowned at the far end of the tent. Mr. Kelly drew hard at the pipe. Mr. O'Ryan leaned towards him, saying in a low voice:

'There are dissinsions—saycrit dissinsions, sor, in the counthry.'

'I know it,' returned Mr. Kelly.

'There are thraitors in the camp,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, knitting his brows.

'Wipe them out,' said Mr. Kelly, taking the pipe from his mouth. 'Wipe them out.'

Mr. O'Ryan straightened himself.

'Good!' said he. 'I expicted that, sor. You have a penetratin' intilligence. Wipe them out! I'll make a note iv that. I take it, sor, that you spake theoretically?'

'Sartinly,' replied Mr. Kelly, who seemed inclined to fall asleep. 'Take it or lave it, as you plaze.'

'Ha! There are intillicts in the counthry yet, thank God!' Mr. O'Ryan raised his eyes reverently as he lifted the glass to his lips.

At this moment Tim Cassidy appeared, his neckcloth tied behind his ear, his left eye blackened. He had a knotted stick under his arm. After staggering a few paces into the tent, he stopped with a sudden jerk, steadying himself to glare about.

'I'm here, misther,' he said hoarsely to Mr. O'Ryan.

'What, me merry fella! Come here, Tim. No, sor; no retrate. Now, sor,' added Mr. O'Ryan to Mr. Kelly, at the same time pulling Tim forward by the shoulder, 'here's a man, sor—a young man—a man, sor, iv the people, wid square shoulders. Hould up yir head, thrue Irishman! You're a thrue Irishman, I take it, Tim?'

Tim, lurching forward, caught himself up to stare heavily at the glasses on the counter.

'I am,' he answered.

'Ha, ha! I like it, sor—I like it spoken straight out. No subterfuge. Let the wurruld hear it. Shout it out, Tim!'

'Sor?'

'Nivir be ashamed iv yir counthry, Tim.'

'No, sor.'

'The man, sor, that's ashamed iv his counthry, let him stand aside.

'"Foes and thraitors, stand aside,"'

hummed Mr. O'Ryan. 'Can you sing, Tim?

'"Foes and thraitors, stand aside.
With the green flag floatin' o'er us,
Foes and thraitors, stand aside, stand aside, stand as——"

Tim!'

'Yis, sor?'

'Did you ivir taste whisky?'

'Did I ivir——' Tim straightened his swaying figure, seeming amazed at the question.

Mr. O'Ryan shook his head playfully from side to side.

'Sor,' said he, 'answer the question. Don't thrifle wid the coort, sor. Eh, Misther Kelly, that's how they do it? Well, sor,' turning again to Tim, 'fair an' square, yis or no? Judge an' jury. Am I right, Tim?'

'Sartinly, sor.'

'Ha, ha! Good! Thrue Irish repartee. Misther Rooney'—Mr. O'Ryan, leaning over the counter, touched the barman with the tip of his finger—'a glass iv the best, Misther Rooney. There's a man here, sor, a connasoor. Are you a connasoor, Timotheus?'

Tim wiped his mouth against his sleeve, changing the stick impatiently from one arm to the other.

'I'll take a dhrink, if I get it,' he said morosely.

While the barman was attending to the requirements of Tim Cassidy, Mr. Kelly, who had been staring about at the customers with an inane smile, suddenly turned to the counter. Placing his face on his arms, he began to weep. Mr. O'Ryan, looking astonished, approached his friend.

'Kelly, not twice in the same day!' he exclaimed. 'This is wakeness.'

Mr. Kelly sobbed on without lifting his head. Mr. O'Ryan, holding up his hand impressively to Tim, whispered, 'Hush!' Then, bending over the editor, he said sympathetically:

'Frind, brother—if I may call you so—what is the matther?'

'Me mother was a good woman,' moaned Mr. Kelly, with a fresh outburst of anguish.

'These,' said Mr. O'Ryan, standing erect, putting

his hand on his breast as he stared at Tim, 'these are saycrid tears.'

'Shure his mother's dead these twenty year,' said Tim angrily.

'Silence, sor!' cried Mr. O'Ryan. 'Are you a thrue Irishman, sor?'

'In coorse I am.'

'Then silence!' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'Let these tears flow.' He rested his hand on Mr. Kelly's bowed shoulders. 'Let them flow, sor, because—I beg yir pardin?'

'She nursed me,' said Mr. Kelly, 'on her knee.'

'Thank God for that,' returned Mr. O'Ryan, patting him gently on the back. 'Let it be a mimiry for you, me brother. Kape it down deep in yir heart until such momints as these, whin the feelins iv a thrue Irishman well up. It is good for me to be here,' said Mr. O'Ryan, looking peacefully around. 'There's an atmosphere iv the sanctity iv home in this spot. I am a betther man for these tears, me brother. But no,' he continued, striking himself on the breast, 'I will not —I will not play the child before the wurruld!'

He gazed sternly at Tim, who, nursing inexplicable wrath, was glaring at Mr. Kelly.

Presently the editor looked up cheerfully, to say:

'I'll take another——'

'Take that!' interrupted Tim. Hitting Mr. Kelly a sudden blow in the face, he sent him staggering to the opposite side of the tent, where the editor fell in a heap.

'Hurroo!' yelled Tim, flourishing his stick and looking about.

Mr. O'Ryan instantly left the tent, making his way through the fair in a disordered state of mind.

He passed through the jostling throng, until he heard his name called behind him. Turning swiftly, he confronted the affrighted face of Miss Hannah Kennedy. She had been in a rough crowd. Her bonnet was crushed, her shawl torn.

'Is it possible it is Mr. O'Ryan? I heard you had gone to America. I am so glad it is not true!'

He gently took her hand.

'Are you indade, madam?' said he. 'Then me feelin's did not play me false, an' I find I have at laste one thrue frind in the ould counthry.'

As she lowered her eyes with embarrassment, a huge drunken countryman hustled her against her companion.

'Scoundhril!' cried Mr. O'Ryan, and, seizing Miss Hannah, he glared over her head after the man.

'Oh, Mr. O'Ryan!' exclaimed Miss Hannah, clinging to him. 'Can you take care of me? I am so nervous among such rough people.'

'Madam, you do me too much honour!'

He bowed as he offered his arm. As they went through the crowd together, she pressed gratefully to him.

'Of course you know, Mr. O'Ryan,' said she, 'I would not come to such a place as this by myself for the world.'

'I take it,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'that you are iv a timid, sensitive disposition. I undherstand that timpirimint, madam; and in a thrue Irishwoman I rispict it.'

'I had Nora, my niece, with me,' she explained, 'but I lost her. I do wish we could see her!'

'Let us sarch. An' now that you are free from apprehinsion, obsarve, madam, the various phasis iv life around us. The coy colleen; her fine broad-showldered lover; the ould people seekin' divarsion in observin' the festivities iv the young; even the little childher sportin' playfully amid their eldhers!'

'How observant you are, Mr. O'Ryan, and what a knowledge of human nature you have!'

He took off his hat, bowing his head towards her face.

'I thank you,' said he—'I thank you, madam. Yir judgment does credit to yir discarnmint. I am, as you say, a studint iv humin nature. In giniril, I am iv a resarved an' thoughtful disposi-

tion; but there are times whin I fale it necessary to unbinnd. Around us we see the thrue Irish pesint in his native iliment: the naturil good-nature wellin' up out iv the foundations that sthrike deep into the sowl iv the unconquered an' unconquerible Irish race!'

'How beautiful!' murmured Miss Hannah.

'Do you think so, madam? Ah, I can but fabley expriss the sintimints iv undyin' nashinality surgin' up from the depths iv me sowl. Here, madam, is a dancin' tint. Here we may see the wit an' humour iv the Irish race concinthrated in a fokiss. Let us enther, madam, an' forgit our sterner natures for awhile.'

She was frightened at this proposition, but, without waiting for her permission, he entered the booth. On both sides people sat on forms. Observing herself rudely stared at, she whispered:

'Let us go.'

He had been gazing towards the end of the tent with a happy smile. Without heeding her request, he led her up close to the platform, whereon a young man and woman were perspiring in the agonies of a jig.

'Good!' cried Mr. O'Ryan to the dancers. 'A thrue Irish jig. Bravo!'

'Arra, Misther O'Ryan, is that yirself?' cried an old country-woman. 'Shure you're welcome, sor!'

'I thank you,' returned Mr. O'Ryan, bowing graciously to her. He added, in a low voice, to his companion: 'You hear? The people know me.'

Presently he began to beat time with his foot. Miss Hannah clung to him. She felt as if her head was turning round, like the earth, on its own axis.

The couple on the boards finished their dance. The man having kissed his partner, both shook hands with the fiddler.

'Now, Misther O'Ryan!' cried the country-woman who had recognised him; 'won't you an' the lady favour us?'

'Ay!' chorussed others. 'Go on, sor!'

Mr. O'Ryan smiled, turning to his companion.

'Shall we plaze the people, madam?' said he; 'it'll sarve me if you unbinnd to plaze thim.'

Amidst the uproarious excitement, Miss Hannah had lost her will-power. She never recollected how she got on the platform; but she remembered dancing with Mr. O'Ryan, who occasionally shouted 'Hurroo!' and—to the fiddler—'More power to yir elbow!' while the people yelled. Then there was a misty memory of a sudden row; a howling crowd; the swaying of the central pole upholding the canvas, and, finally, the complete collapse of the tent. When she became conscious she was in her own quiet bedroom at home.

But Mr. O'Ryan did not lose consciousness.

Struggling through the wild mass of humanity, he wriggled from under the folds of the tent. When his head appeared without, he was seized by the hair with a strong hand, which, dragging him free, set him upon his feet. He was in a crowd. He staggered through them until he felt himself in contact with a barrel. Instinctively mounting to the top, he raised his hand.

'Fella counthrymin!' he exclaimed. 'Do not be alarrumed. I'm safe, an' no bones broken, thanks be to God! If you'll stop shoutin' a momint, I'll take this opportunity iv askin' you to jine the Ballycusha branch iv the Nashnal Lague which I've istablished. The giniral kindniss shown to me since I first cum amongst you——'

The people who were endeavouring to extract the inmates from the fallen tent surged round the barrel, with the result that Mr. O'Ryan abruptly disappeared over the heads of those in the rear. As before, he was grasped by a firm hand—this time the hand of Father Pat—who, as he dragged him through the excited mob, struck right and left with his umbrella, exclaiming:

'Git out iv the way, ye spalpeens! Don't you see it's yir priest!'

They scattered so readily before him that he was soon in an open space, holding Mr. O'Ryan firmly by the wrist.

When they reached the gate, Father Pat headed doggedly towards his own residence. O'Ryan pulled himself up.

'Am I undher arrist?' he asked proudly.

'Undher arrist y' are,' replied Father Pat.

'As an Irishman,' returned Mr. O'Ryan firmly but respectfully, 'I decline to be thrated like a culprit.'

'Arra, man, who's thratin' you like a culprit?' exclaimed Father Pat. 'Come on, an' don't have the people starin' at us. It's to me own house an' your house I want you to go. I withdraw the ordher to America.'

'Lies the land that way?' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'I go wid you, sor; but you may let go me slave.'

'Give me yir wurrud not to escape,' said his reverence.

'I give it, sor,' replied O'Ryan, 'the wurrud iv a thrue Irishman.'

Father Pat released him. Neither spoke until they reached the house, when they went upstairs.

'Sit down,' said Father Pat, pointing to a chair. 'Are you hungry? What wud you like to ate?'

'I thank you, sor, I'm not hungry; but if you had a taste iv——'

Father Pat, who was nervously flushed, putting his hand into his pocket, pulled forth a ring of keys.

'D' you see that kay?' said he. 'It's the kay iv the cupboard over there. Open it. Take what you plaze, an' as much as you plaze.'

O'Ryan gazed at the key in his hand, looked at Father Pat, advanced a step to the cabinet, then turned round.

'Yir rivirence——' said he.

'What is it, boy?' asked Father Pat in a choked voice.

'Sor, I have a request to make. Permit me, sor, to kiss yir hand.'

Stooping to Father Pat's hand, he put it to his lips, then silently turned to the cabinet. Father Pat threw up his arms.

'I've got him agin, glory be to God!' he exclaimed.

Sitting down in his armchair, his reverence burst into tears.

XI.

VAL INSULTS NORA.

MISS HANNAH lay three days in bed with a sprained ankle. On the fourth afternoon, Nora, assisted by Delia, placed her in an easy-chair, wrapping shawls about her shoulders.

Delia having left the room, Nora stood at the window looking across the stable-yard. Miss Hannah sighed.

'You may well sigh!' observed Nora. 'The monotony of one's life here is simply dreadful.'

'Oh, my dear,' said Miss Hannah, 'how thankless you are! You have every comfort, surrounded with loving attentions, and you are unhappy. How if you were like me, suffering pain?'

'Well, if you had not danced in that horrible tent——'

'Nora,' returned her aunt, 'you are constantly reminding me of that. What a nasty disposition you have! No doubt if Mr. O'Ryan had asked you, you would have danced too.'

'Bon Dieu, no fear,' said Nora, 'with that detestable wretch!'

'Silence, Nora!' exclaimed her aunt. 'How dare you speak of that noble man in such words? If you had only half his beautiful sentiments or his great mind——'

'Heaven forbid, aunt!'

'Ah, you are jealous.'

Nora turned amazed.

'Jealous, aunt?' she exclaimed.

'Yes. With all your youth and good looks, you have not won him.'

'How can you talk so, aunt? I hate the sight of him.'

'Oh yes! He has not danced attendance on you. He is not one of your empty-headed young gentlemen who are caught by a pretty face.'

'No,' replied Nora; 'he prefers gray hairs and a religious disposition.'

Miss Hannah's face became red, her eyes filling with tears.

'This is too much,' said she, 'from the child I reared with a m—mother's care.'

Nora, mad at the sight of her aunt's reddened face, would have angrily retorted but for the entrance of Delia, who said:

'A gintleman downstairs wishes to see you, miss.'

Nora instantly loved the whole human race. She felt certain that Val had come at last, after two weeks' absence, which had seemed two years.

'I'll go down directly,' she said to Delia.

She hurried to the mirror, brushed her hair, shook out her dress, then went on her knees beside her aunt, whom she kissed, saying:

'Forgive me, auntie dear.'

Her aunt pushed her away.

'Go,' said she, 'to your lover with your hypocritical smiles.'

'Oh, aunt!' protested Nora. But she lightheartedly left the room.

She ran downstairs ready to throw herself into Val's arms or to upbraid him for neglect, but when she opened the sitting-room door, she stood in the presence of Mr. O'Ryan. He was on the hearthrug, balancing his hat between his hands.

'Is it you!' said she.

'It's me,' replied Mr. O'Ryan, bowing gracefully, 'on me way into town. I thought it only right an' proper to call an' inquire how yir dear aunt was gettin' on. It was only to-day I was tould she'd bin hurt. There's no internil injuries, I hope?'

Nora stood stiffly near the door.

'Oh no,' she answered. 'Her ankle's sprained, that's all.'

'Ha, I'm glad it's no wurrse. An' how are you gettin' on yirself? Still purty and bloomin'?'

'I am very well, thank you.'

'Right! But won't you be sated?' said Mr. O'Ryan politely. 'Don't stand on cirimony wid me. Trate me like an ould frind. You'll find me worth cultivatin'. It's thrue, the people stand in awe iv me, because they regard me as a heavinsint layder; but I can lay aside me dignity, an' unbinnd to me frinds. An' I want you to be a frind iv mine, Miss Nora. I fale a deep intherest in you.'

'That is very kind of you,' returned Nora cynically.

She sat down on the sofa to stroke her dog, the rough terrier Fido, who lay curled in slumber. Mr. O'Ryan drew a chair so close to Nora that their knees almost touched.

'Kind iv me?' said he. 'An' why shudn't I be kind to a swate young lady like yirself? Shure, it's a thrue Irish colleen y' are, wid yir purty ways an' illigint manners. If I mistake not, Miss Nora, you wor sint into the wurruld to sit the hearts iv min on fire. Am I right, bewitcher?'

His head aside, he viewed her with an air of tender badinage. Nora kept her eyes on Fido, whom she gently stroked. She disliked Mr. O'Ryan, chiefly because she believed that he was, in some way,

the cause of her old nurse's unhappiness. But she felt that she should not be absolutely discourteous to him.

'You are inclined to flatter, Mr. O'Ryan,' said she.

'No, no,' he returned. 'I'm sinsare to me heart's core. It may be a wakeness, but it's me nature. An' I think, if I may say so widout bouldness, yir own little flutterin' heart wud bate sinsarely if yir affections wor cintered on a man worthy iv thim. Am I right? Ah,' he added playfully, 'that timid little blush, thim downcast eyes—Miss Nora, you see, I can rade the humin heart.'

She moved slightly away as his knees touched her dress. At the same moment she felt an almost irresistible desire to set Fido at his throat.

'Supposin', now,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, 'there was a man in love wid you——'

'Pray don't suppose anything of the kind.'

'Aha, thrue maidin modisty! It does you credit. I like it,' he added with a tone of proprietorship which maddened her. 'It adds to yir numerus attractions. But let us suppose, now, for the sake iv argumint, there was a man in love wid you——'

'Mr. O'Ryan——'

'Wait a moment. Not a ordiniry man. Not a fop. Not a mere buttherfly iv fashin. But a man

wid great aims in life; a man that cud lift you from obscurity, an' place you be his side before the eyes iv the wurruld——'

'I beg, sir——'

'A man,' continued Mr. O'Ryan, sitting straight up, as he thrust his hand into his bosom, 'who was born to be faymis; to lade the people in their sthruggle for fraydim; a man,' he added, dropping his voice, 'undher whose strength iv charracter you cud nessle in yir timid little way wid perfict safety; who cud pertect you, who cud give you a faymiss name, an' one whom you cud look up to an' be proud iv——'

Nora rose to leave, when, to her delight, she heard the voice of Val Blake in the hall. Next moment he had entered. Seeing Mr. O'Ryan, he turned severely to Nora.

'Excuse me,' said he coldly, 'I fear I intrude.'

'Oh no, Master Val,' cried Nora, as he turned away. 'No, Mr. Blake. Come in, please,' pleadingly.

Mr. O'Ryan rose.

'How do you do, sor?' said he. 'You're not inthrudin', sor, in the laste. We,' with an inclination of his head towards Nora, 'can resoom our convirsation—our intherestin' convirsation, I may say—at some future time. I hope you are well, sor.'

Val glanced disdainfully at him.

'Thank you, I am very well,' he replied.

'I am very glad to hear it, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan, with a look of defiance. 'In some sinse, sor, I invy you. Borrn in the lap iv luxury, the sarious affairs of life can well sit lightly on you.'

When Nora observed the hatred with which the two men confronted each other, she felt a thrill of pride at being the cause. Her spirits instantly rose.

'Won't you sit down, Master Val? Pray don't let us have political discussions; they are so tiresome. Are you going, Mr. O'Ryan?'

He turned affectionately to her.

'I've an appintmint wid his rivirence,' said he, 'so you'll have to excuse me. Some other time we can discuss the subjict iv our convirsation. Good-bye for the prisint.'

He shook hands, detaining hers until she withdrew it abruptly, an action Val observed with lowering face. On his way out Mr. O'Ryan bowed slightly to Val, who looked at him from head to foot.

'Oh, thank goodness!' exclaimed Nora delightedly, when she heard the front-door close. 'I'm so glad he's gone!'

'Are you?' exclaimed Val angrily. 'Flirt!'

Nora recoiled, and grasped the back of a chair.

'Val,' she said, panting, 'what—what do you mean?'

'I mean what I say,' cried he. 'I am sorry I interrupted your love-making. But I might have known,' he added; 'I have been making a fool of myself long enough. I am glad my eyes are open in time. You are welcome to Mr. O'Ryan, and,' he added with sudden bitterness, 'Mr. O'Ryan is welcome to you.'

She gasped as she sunk into the chair. The colour fled her face. He acknowledged to himself, as he watched her silent anguish, that he had struck her a cruel blow; but he would not regret it; his own feelings, he felt, justified it.

'I'll go now,' said he, lifting his hat from the table.

He paused for her to speak, but she did not.

'For ever,' he added.

When he turned to the door, he paused again. She made no sign. A sudden remorse seized him. He faced her, saying:

'Have you nothing to say?'

She had been crushing her hands together as she gazed dazedly at the carpet. With an effort she rose.

'I have nothing to say,' she replied, 'except this—I hope I may never see you again.'

'Why, Nora——'

'Don't speak to me!' she cried passionately. 'How dare you address me? Do not ever dare to speak to me again!'

He was about to utter an abject apology, when Mr. Kennedy entered, having previously wiped his boots noisily on the mat.

'Hullo, little woman, you're here, are you? Arra, Masther Val, is that yirself? How are you? How is ivry inch iv you? Let's look at you. Shure, it's hansumer an' manlier you're growin' ivry day. Eh, Nora? Come, little woman, be candid for wanst. Don't you think he's improvin'? Ah, the little witch hangs her head! Bedad, she's a sly rogue! Ah, Masther Val,' giving Val a playful thump on the chest that almost knocked him down, 'Nora has her own opinions, I'll be bound. Hullo, little woman, where are you off to?'

He seized Nora as she was hurrying out.

'Let me go, father,' said she.

'What for, avic? Come, now, an' look at Masther Val here, an' give an honest opinion about him. Isn't he a dacent, well-set-up bit iv a boy? Out wid it!'

'Father, let me go. I have to feed my pigeons.'

'Oho, the pijins! Will you desart Masther Val for a lot iv pijins? Get along wid you! Shure

you're not me daughter at all, at all. You're somebody else. Ha, ha! Pijins, bedad!'

She slipped away. Mr. Kennedy, finding himself in the awkward position of unaided host, after several attempts to excite Val's interest in the state of the crops, finally invited him to the stables to view a newly-bought mare. Val, as he followed him through the passage, the kitchen, across the courtyard into the stables, furtively peered about for Nora.

Mr. Kennedy moved the mare in her stall, showed her teeth, lifted her hoofs, and struck her with his open hand.

'There's a fine bit iv horse-flesh for you!'

'A beautiful mare,' said Val mournfully—'a beautiful mare. I hurt her feelings.'

Mr. Kennedy stared at him across the mare's back.

'What's that?' he asked.

'Nothing,' replied Val, stroking the quivering haunches. 'She'd go splendidly after the hounds. I wish I had her. I must beg her pardon.'

'Beg her pardon?' said Mr. Kennedy, looking up in amazement, as he stooped to lift the mare's foreleg.

Val did not reply. He did not hear the question. Taking advantage of Mr. Kennedy's absorbed

contemplation of the mare's hoof, he hurried from the stable unobserved.

Crossing the yard, he went through a gate to the path which led to the out-offices. He passed the haggard and cow sheds until he reached a low wall. Looking over, he saw a cloud of agitated pigeons flying from the roofs of the sheds and the boxes on the walls. Nora stood in the yard with a basket of corn on her arm. She threw handfuls of food to the pigeons, who strutted chuckling about her feet. On the window-sill sat Fido, his head awry, studiously but silently watching the birds. Nora's back was turned to Val.

'Nora,' he whispered. But the noise of the muttering birds drowned his voice.

'Nora!' he said louder, in a tone of remorse.

She started, flung several hasty handfuls in various directions, but said nothing.

'Won't you speak to me, Nora?' asked Val, coming closer. He looked over the wall with an expression of profound misery. She turned away, scattering the corn. 'I'm very sorry, Nora,' he moaned. 'I won't do it again. Say you forgive me!'

'No!' exclaimed Nora. She did not look up, but she stamped her foot so passionately that a crowd of frightened pigeons took flight, almost hiding her from sight, as she hurried through the

door towards the kitchen. The faithful Fido, suddenly realizing her departure, jumped down, and dashed through the pigeons after his mistress.

Val sighed deeply, then walked away, believing himself the most miserable man on earth.

XII.

OLD PADDY.

NORA, having run into the kitchen to give the basket of corn to a servant, wandered aimlessly about the house, Fido at her heels. If she sat down, Fido reclined on the floor beside her; when she rose, Fido rose too; if she stood irresolutely gazing about, he remained with inquiring eyes fixed on her face until she moved again, when he wagged his tail as he fell into line behind her. He had many temptations to leave her—for instance, when he saw a cat crossing the passage, the wild desire of the assassin possessed him; but he conquered the weakness to follow his mistress. When Nora went into the garden, he was at her side, watching her shutting the gate. Then, knowing that he could hear her leaving, he took a mad scamper round the paths. Nora heard him presently, barking furiously. Arriving on the scene of action, she saw him tearing the gravel with his front paws, his tail erect. He was in-

sulting old Paddy with a hubbub of short barks. Paddy was on his knees, groping for weeds.

'Why, Paddy!' said Nora.

He slowly looked up, then pulled his forelock.

'Yir honour's ladyship,' said he.

'Why, Paddy, get up. You've done enough. I thought you'd have gone.'

He rose stiffly. When on his feet, he pulled his forelock again, his under-jaw heavily working.

'Yir honour's ladyship; ould Paddy—he wudn't go widout yir honour's lave.'

Fido, secretly skirmishing in a semicircle, pounced on old Paddy's hat, which lay in the clay a few yards in the rear. Nora produced her purse.

'It will take you a long time to get home,' said she. 'It's a long way to your home, Paddy.'

'Up the Cusha mountin, yir honour.'

'And now, Paddy, what am I to give you for your day's work?'

Paddy began to tremble. Slowly his shaking hand went up to scratch his head. His eyes glittered at her honour's ladyship, who stood smiling, though sad at heart, her fingers poised over the open purse.

'Well, Paddy?'

'Yir honour's ladyship, it's not for ould Paddy —it's not for ould Paddy to tell yir honour. Mebbe thruppence?' he added, after an anxious pause.

Meanwhile, Fido was growling over the hat, holding it to the ground with his forepaws, as he cast the bitten bits over his shoulder.

'Threepence for a day's work!' exclaimed Nora.

Paddy bowed his head lower.

'Yir honour's ladyship,' said he, 'it's not for the likes iv me to say how much to yir honour. But tuppence 'll do ould Paddy. An' if yir honour had some ould coins belike for herself?'

'Old coins?'

'Bad wans,' he explained hastily. 'She doesn't know the differ. I tell her they come all the way from America from Larry. She doesn't know the differ.'

'I've no bad coins, Paddy,' said Nora, 'for your wife; but I'll send her a bottle of whisky next week.'

The old peasant raised his hand to the sky.

'May the blessed Vargin kape yir honour's ladyship! May the saints in glory bless yir honour! Mebbe yir honour ud say,' he added, with that fierce contraction of his brows which indicated an effort of thought, 'whether the ships are sailin' from America still? I ax pardin iv yir honour for makin' so bould.'

'They sail every other day, Paddy.'

'For Ireland, yir honour?'

'Yes, indeed,' replied Nora, with tears in her eyes;

'and some day soon, I hope, one will come with Larry in it.'

Old Paddy burst into a convulsive chuckle, his toothless mouth distended. He struck himself on the breast.

'I tould herself so. I tell her ivry day. God bless yir ladyship for sayin' so. An' I tould her the ship ud stand in be the Cusha mountin. The ship ud stand in be the Cusha mountin, I tould her. Larry ud say to the captain: "There's me home. Let me down there, if you plaze, sor." An' wudn't the captin let him down, yir honour?'

'Why, of course, Paddy.'

He chuckled convulsively again, shaking himself in his rags.

'In coorse,' said he. 'Why shud the captin bring her all the way to Quanestown whin he cud dhrop Larry alongside the Cusha mountin? I tould herself that, yir honour. But sometimes she won't belave me. She's bin hearin' the Banshee.'

Nora hastily crossed herself.

'Oh, your wife has heard the Banshee?'

Old Paddy, looking mysteriously round, dropped his voice.

'Wid rispicts to yir honour's ladyship, herself has bin listenin' to it. "Wurra, wurra," I ses, "it's not Larry's Banshee. It cudn't be," I ses, "for he promised to come home safe an' sound."'

Nora thrust her fingers into her purse.

'Paddy, hold out your hand,' said she.

He pulled his hair before holding out his hand. It was a withered hand, encrusted with clay. She carefully dropped five shillings one after another into his palm. During this extraordinary proceeding, transcending everything in his experience since his son Larry went to America, old Paddy's jaw dropped, his right arm trembling so much that he had to clutch the elbow with his left hand. When his fingers at last closed over the coins, he looked up at Nora. His lips moved as if in thanks, but he was unable to utter a word.

'And now good-bye, Paddy,' said she brightly. 'Come again this day week.'

He looked after her, muttering blessings. At length he became conscious of Fido's vandalism, and turning humbly to the dog, he said:

'Let ould Paddy's hat go, if you plaze.'

Fido, finding his mistress gone, trotted after her with the hat between his teeth, worrying it. Old Paddy hastily but tremblingly followed him. Fido, dropping the hat at Nora's feet, looked up for approbation.

'Well, Paddy, and what is it?' asked Nora graciously.

'Wid rispicts to yir honour's ladyship. An' may the Vargin bless an' purtict you! If yir honour

wud ask him '—respectfully indicating Fido—' to give ould Paddy his hat.'

' How dare you, Fido! Go away, sir! I'm very angry with you.'

She stamped her foot at Fido, who bounded into the air, ran a few steps, compressed his body, and barked playfully at her. Old Paddy took up his hat. Nora walked away, threatening Fido with her forefinger.

Before leaving the garden, Paddy drew from his bosom a small bag, hung by a string round his neck. He carefully counted the five shillings into the bag before covering it again in his ragged coat.

The way was long up the Cusha mountain. The stones cut through his broken brogues, but he felt no fatigue. The five shillings, added to a little hoard, would complete his year's rent due next week. His wife would have a roof, such as it was, for the coming year.

He had not gone far, when he heard his name peremptorily called. Shading his eyes with a shaking hand, he saw, on the road beneath, Father Pat with Mr. O'Ryan.

'Is that ould Paddy?' shouted Father Pat.

'It is, yir rivirence,' muttered the old man.

They did not hear him.

'Don't you hear his rivirence addhressin' you?' cried Mr. O'Ryan. 'Come down here, sor.'

Old Paddy tremulously retraced his steps, until he stood on the highroad, bareheaded, before the two gentlemen. Cringing with excessive humility, he kept his head bent as if the light of their presence dazzled him.

'Where are you goin', sor?' demanded Father Pat, inflating his chest.

Paddy pulled his matted gray hair.

'Yir sacrid rivirence,' said he.

'Don't you hear his rivirence axin' you a plain question, pesint?' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan, thrusting his hand into his bosom. 'Answer the question, pesint.'

Old Paddy, glancing at the speaker, said servilely:

'Yir honour's honour.'

'He's a dull ould cratur,' observed Father Pat to his companion. 'I'm afeard his wits are not the sthrongest.'

'Permit me, yir rivirence,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'to rouse the slumberin' faculties iv this pesint. Now, pesint!'

'Yir honour's honour.'

Mr. O'Ryan, stretching his legs apart, with his hands in his trousers-pockets, put his head on one side.

'Now, pesint,' said he, 'where were you goin' whin his rivirence did you the honour iv callin' you back?'

'Where, your honour?'

Old Paddy looked dazedly about.

'Come, pesint, no privarication. Answer the question. It's a sthrange thing, sor, I've obsarved,' said Mr. O'Ryan to Father Pat, 'the Irish pesintry nivir give a sthraight answer to a plain question. Pesint!'

'God kape yir honour!'

'Were you goin' home?'

'Wid yir honour's lave.'

'Ha,' said Mr. O'Ryan triumphantly to Father Pat, 'we are gettin' at him at last. Now thin, pesint, why were you goin' home?'

'Wid yir gracious honour's lave. Plaze, yir honour, I'd bin workin' all day at the farm pluckin' wades for her honour's ladyship——'

'Miss Nora?' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan with curiosity.

'Wid yir honour's lave.'

'Ha! very good. An' havin' worked all day in the farm gardin, you were goin' home?'

'To Herself.'

'He manes his ould wife,' explained Father Pat. 'He has an ould wife up there. She's a poor dark cratur.'

Old Paddy, with a gleam of intelligence, watched Father Pat's face as he spoke. Then, shaking his head, muttered:

'Yir sacrid rivirence! Herself! Ay, troth, dark these twenty year.'

'She hasn't seen the light iv heavin for twenty years,' said Father Pat.

The old man drew his sleeve across his eyes.

'The light iv heavin,' said he, 'wid yir rivirence's lave, nor the face iv her son afore he wint across the say.'

'Pesint!' said Mr. O'Ryan, then paused. 'Are you list'nin'?' he added severely.

Old Paddy, starting, pulled at his hair.

'How much did Miss Nora give you for yir day's work?'

'God bless yir honour! Five silver shillins the noble lady gev ould Paddy.'

'Five shillings?'

'Wid yir honour's lave. 'Twill pay the rint, plaze God; an' Herself 'll lave ould Paddy alone about it, morn, noon an' night.'

'Pay the rint?' repeated Mr. O'Ryan, horror-stricken. 'To who, pesint?'

Paddy looked stupidly from one to the other, too bewildered to catch the question.

'To Sir Howard Blake,' explained Father Pat.

Mr. O'Ryan stepped back, threatening the old peasant with uplifted arm.

'To Blake?' he exclaimed. 'To that blud-suckin' lan'lord, that wallows in the sweat iv the

land? Ould man,' he advanced, while old Paddy crouched humbly, not daring to lift his eyes from the ground, 'listen to me. I'm yir layder, an' I give you warnin': pay rint at yir peril till I give you lave!'

Father Pat's nostrils had been working in display of anger. The blood was hot in his face as he stared at the crouching peasant.

'He wudn't do it!' exclaimed Father Pat, with a sudden burst of passion. 'He wudn't give a shillin' to the chapel, an' he has nivir done it, an' he expicts absilooshin!'

'Yir rivirence!'

Old Paddy, dropping on his knees, uplifted trembling hands.

'You expict absilooshin an' the last saycrimints from yir priest,' said Father Pat, wrathfully choking, 'you graceless ould sinner! An' you think you'll git yir sowl sooner out iv purgatry be payin' rint to yir lan'lord rather than givin' what money you have to yir priest. Is that what you mane?'

Paddy shook from head to foot as he knelt on the hard road.

'Yir sacrid rivirence! Ould Paddy! Shure, the rint's bin due a year gone. Herself—"Pay it," she ses, yir sacrid rivirence, "an' kape the roof over us."'

'Thin, you'd sooner pay money for the roof iv an

ould cabin over yir ould carkiss than for the roof iv hevin over yir sowl?'

'Sacrid rivirence!'

The uplifted hands were clasped above the gray, trembling head, while Paddy's knees bled against the stones.

'What will I do wid this incorrigible ould sinner?' cried Father Pat, appealing to his companion. 'Will I put an ass's head on his showlders?'

There was a shriek of anguish. Paddy went down grovelling with his face against Father Pat's boot, which he caressed with his hands.

'Marcy, yir sacrid rivirence! Marcy!'

'Bedad, I'm betwixt two minds!' exclaimed Father Pat.

Old Paddy suddenly rose to a kneeling position. Plunging his shaking hands into his bosom, he tore the bag of shillings from his starved throat. Then, crawling closer to Father Pat, he caught him by the coat-tails, holding up the little bag.

'Sacrid rivirence, it's yours! Don't put an ass's head on ould Paddy! Me son, yir rivirence, to come back an' find his ould father an ass! Take the money, an' let ould Paddy go.'

Father Pat, taking three of the shillings, returned the bag. He laid his hand on the old man's head.

'That's the bist thing you've ivir done,' said he; 'an' I'll have a prayer said for yir sowl nixt Mass. Go home, now, in the name iv God, an' I'll let you off this time. But don't timpt me agin!'

Paddy remained on his knees, mumbling. There was froth on his lips, and his hands wandered tremulously about his bosom.

'Git up, pesint,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'an' thank yir stars his rivirence had pity on you. I think we may go now, sor,' he added to Father Pat.

When they were gone, old Paddy remained on his knees for some time, muttering. Suddenly he jumped up to run feverishly along the mountain path until he arrived at a small pool of water lying in a ditch. He went on hands and knees, peering closely at his reflection. Then, with a deep sigh, he rose.

'Holy Vargin be praised!' he cried. 'It's me own head!'

XIII.

THE FLAG OF DISTRESS.

WHEN Paddy had reached the top of the mountain, the path had dwindled away. He was amongst rocks and furze. His hovel was upon the other side of the brow. Originally he had owned a small holding at the foot of the mountain, but he had been driven up, little by little, until finally he had been allowed to plant himself on the extreme margin of cultivation, face to face with the Atlantic. He had cleared some patches between the boulders to grow a few sickly potatoes. The furze, which grew plentifully about, he cut to make into brooms, for which there was an occasional demand in Ballycusha.

His hovel was built of dried peat, the roof of furze being held down by flat stones. This dwelling had been erected against a rock, which in some degree protected it against the weather. As he approached it he was hailed from the door by Herself, a feeble, blind old woman with a shrivelled face, her gray hair hanging about her cheeks, her

clothes a permanent layer of rags. Her head and feet were bare.

'You've come at last!' cried this old creature, shaking her claw-like hand towards him. 'Left me starvin'. A hard ould man! What have you for me?'

As Paddy came wearily through the rocks, he began, in his cracked voice, to croon an old Irish jig tune. The old woman angrily struck her hands together.

'Glory be to God!' she exclaimed. 'It's singin' he is! No thought iv the lone ould woman. It's a hard ould man he is, an' always was.'

He staggered forward simulating intoxication.

'Where are yiz?' he snarled.

Herself, slapping her knees, mouthed fiercely.

'He's dhrunk!' she shrieked. 'A hard ould man, an' he's dhrunk. Didn't care if the lone woman nivir tasted bite or sup. Where are you, ould man?'

She groped about the doorway until he pretended to stumble against her, when she seized him. She pulled a small black bottle from his bosom.

'Is there a dhrop left?' she screamed—'a dhrop left, hard ould man?'

'Thry it,' said Paddy, following her into the hovel. 'The bist dhrop in Ballycusha. Bad luck t' me if they didn't fill me wid dhrink this day.

Ould Paddy here, ould Paddy there! Dhrink, ould Paddy! Ay, an' a wee taste for Herself! Bring it to her, ould Paddy! It'll warm the cratur's ould heart! Paddy here and Paddy there! Dhrinkin', aytin' an' smokin', the divil such a day as I spint!'

Exhausted with hunger he lay down before a small fire of smouldering turf. As there was no chimney, the smoke filled the hovel, but he was so accustomed to the atmosphere that he could see Herself seated opposite on a stool, putting the bottle ravenously to her lips.

'It's wake, it's wake!' she cried.

He watched her sightless eyes turn about.

'Bedad, it's yirsilf that's wake,' said he, 'when you don't know good whisky from bad. Hand 's a dhrop iv it, anyhow.'

He stretched a hand. She clasped the bottle to her breast.

'Ye hard ould man! Afther all the dhrink you had this blissid day!'

'Ay, shure, I forgot. I'm afeard I took more than was good for me.'

Resting his face on his arm, he stretched his legs. The whisky in the bottle was a small quantity largely diluted with water; but Paddy had for years so persistently distorted Herself's imagination, that she accepted his assertion of the strength of

the liquor. She sat sipping while Paddy snored on the floor. Presently, taking a small blackened clay pipe from her bosom, she groped about for a piece of lit turf from the hearth, screwing it with her fingers into the bowl of the pipe. Resuming her seat, she smoked with slow long breaths, sucking in her jaws until they almost met. Thus she remained for some moments, her hands on her knees, her sightless eyes blinking at the fire. Then she began to grumble between the puffs of smoke.

'A hard ould man—aytin', dhrinkin' an' smokin'. Come day, go day, God sind Sunda! That's the way wid him. Where's the letther, me boy—Larry's letther?'

She turned sharply to her husband, who snored as if in reply. She set her face again towards the fire. The wind began to rise.

'A hard ould man.'

The wind died away. Old Paddy snored peacefully. Kneeling beside him, she took from his pocket some broken bread and meat which she concealed in the folds of her clothes as she resumed her seat and pipe.

'Where's the letther?' she repeated.

Old Paddy rose on his elbow. He looked sleepily at her.

'Ay, troth,' said he, 'the letther—Larry's letther. Och, it's safe; I have it here.'

'Arra, thin, why don't you rade it?' she exclaimed angrily.

Fumbling in his coat, he produced a piece of an old newspaper which had passed as Larry's letter from America a score of times. As he rattled it, the face of Herself grew smoother. She knocked the pipe against her hand to loosen the tobacco.

'Me boy Larry!' she murmured.

'He ses——' began Paddy, looking at the piece of newspaper.

'Ay, what does he say? Me boy Larry!'

'The postman ud scarcely give it to me,' explained old Paddy. '"There's a penny to pay on it," ses he; "for," ses he, "it's a heavy letther to come all the way," ses he, "from America," ses he.'

'Rade it, anyhow, an' don't mind the postmasther,' said old Biddy impatiently.

'Wait till I make a bit iv a blaze.'

He stretched his leg, striking the turf with his heel, until the sparks flew to the rafters.

'There, now,' said he. '"Dear Father and Mother, —I take me pen in hand to write you these few lines, hopin' you are well as this laves me at prisint, thank God for it. I risaved yir last letther be the mornin' post last Frida, an' shure it's the fine fist me father's able to write for a man that nivir got any larnin'. Hows'ever, I'm glad to tell you I've bin makin' a power iv money out here in America,

an' tell me mother," ses he, "tell me ould mother I've a tidy sum in an ould stockin', which, plaze God," ses he, "I'll bring back wid me——"'

'Och, wurra, wurra!' cried Herself, striking her knees; 'he's bin gone a long time. Why doesn't he come back? Doesn't he say a wurrud about comin' back?'

'Arra, don't be so fond iv interruptin',' said Paddy. 'Wait till I git to the end iv the letther.'

He twisted the paper about, clearing his throat before proceeding:

'"Tell me mother, God bless her, not to be always interruptin', for," ses he, "whin I come home it's fifty head iv cattle I mane to buy—head iv——"'

For a moment, old Paddy paused. Then, with a yell which made his wife jump, he knelt before her. 'Fale me head,' he moaned.

'What?' screamed the frightened old woman.

'Fale me head, acushla,' he urged feverishly. 'Just put yir hands about me head an' tell me if it's there.'

She felt his face with trembling hands.

'Wurra, wurra, what a quare ould man y' are,' said she. 'What's the matther wid you at all, at all? Shure there's nothin' wrong wid yir head.'

'The saints be praised!' he exclaimed, greatly relieved. 'I was afeard——'

He crossed himself as he sat down. The wind rattled at the door.

'Is that all Larry has to say to his ould mother?'

'Shure there's nothin' more,' replied Paddy, gazing dreamily at the blue flame of the turf. 'He ses he can see the flag iv disthress wid a lookin'-glass ivry mornin' before goin' to work.'

'Me darlin' boy,' crooned the old woman, 'come home, come home!'

Paddy stretched himself again for slumber. His wife sat thinking of her son until she too felt sleepy. She lay down on a bundle of sacks in the corner. Having devoutly repeated her prayers, she took from her bosom the bag of counterfeit coins which Paddy had laboriously gathered. Still weighing them lovingly in her hand, she fell asleep.

Towards early morning the storm abated. Old Paddy went out with anxious fears for the flag of distress which had stood since Larry's departure on the rock beside the hovel. The pole had been bent by the wind; the flag had been torn, leaving a few fluttering rags. He nailed an old petticoat of Herself's to the pole, and this, the new flag of distress, waved in the breeze. Old Paddy then stood on the rock as the morning sun rose above the Atlantic. Shading his eyes, he gazed earnestly across the water. But he failed to see America, and no ship hove in sight. Sighing heavily, he clambered down to his hovel.

XIV.

DIPLOMACY AND LOVE.

FATHER PAT and Mr. O'Ryan continued their journey down the mountain road. The slight incident of meeting old Paddy passed quickly from their minds as they discussed the affairs of the Ballycusha National League.

'We must ubtain Farmer Kennedy at all hazards,' said Father Pat.

'We shall ubtain him, yir rivirence,' returned Mr. O'Ryan.

'Don't be too shure iv that, Ignatius—don't be too shure. Ay, ay. A close-fisted man. He doesn't know the ind of his wealth. I'd like to git a look at his bank-book. Well, I've bin in this parish twinty-five year, an' Farmer Kennedy has added nigh two hunderd acres to his grazing ground alone in that time.'

'Well, sor, all the betther! The richer he is the more raisin we must git hould iv him. Lave him to me.'

'Git hould iv him? Troth, you don't know him

as well as I do. A close-fisted, slippery man the same Kennedy. I know him well, in an' out iv saison; an' he wudn't give a farden to a beggar to save his life, not to spake iv the mane way he supports his rilijin.'

'Very good, sor! He will in future not only support his rilijin, but contribute freely to the impov'rished funds iv the Nashnil Lague.'

Father Pat took a curious glance at his companion.

'Why, it's mighty confident y' are,' he observed.

Mr. O'Ryan smiled brightly, but said nothing. Father Pat, knowing that there must be some reason for this confident manner, prepared to discover it.

'Shure you don't mane to say,' he began cautiously, 'that you know more iv Farmer Kennedy then I do meself.'

'Yir rivirence,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'this man has, I understand, a daughter?'

'Ay, ay,' admitted his reverence with a dissatisfied growl. 'What's that got to do wid it?'

'Ivrything, yir august rivirence!' said Mr. O'Ryan with sudden hilarity. 'You're an observint man, sor—a great man in yir way—a man, sor, iv excillint parts an' sage discrimination——'

'Arra, what are you blarneyin' about?' interrupted Father Pat, with a shrug of his right shoulder.

'Sor,' replied Mr. O'Ryan, 'admittin' all yir vartues an' the great grasp iv yir intillict as I do, still, sor, I'm bound to say there's one quality that you lack in a misurable degree——'

'An' what's that, thin?'

Mr. O'Ryan, laying his hand gently on Father Pat's arm, replied in a low tone:

'Diplomicy!'

'Well, well, an' how d'you make that out?'

Father Pat struggled to appear acute instead of bewildered.

Mr. O'Ryan, straightening himself, touched his companion again on the arm with the tips of his fingers.

'Farmer Kennedy, sor,' said he, 'has a daughter.'

'Shure, you said that before.'

'Very good, sor,' continued Mr. O'Ryan imperturbably. 'That daughter, sor, is in the bloom iv youth an' beauty; susceptible, sor, to the influence iv a riprisintative iv the sthronger sex, if the riprisintative appeared. That daughter, sor, may have met that man. She may have resaved him at first with maidin timidity, an' ivintually wid admiration not unmingled wid rispict. Sor, I will not say if that man has appeared. I've said enough. You're a man iv deep insight.'

'If this,' began Father Pat, after a thoughtful pause, 'is as you state——'

'Pardin me, sor,' interrupted Mr. O'Ryan, 'I make no statemint. I merely say, if such an' such happined, thin such an' such may result. I will not commit meself.'

'But you lade me to undherstand——'

'Me good sor,' interrupted Mr. O'Ryan again, 'as you injaniously put it, I lade you to undherstand. Enough! I will ask you a simple question, sor: Does Farmer Kennedy, or does Farmer Kennedy not, think the wurruld an' all iv his daughter?'

'She's the apple iv his eye,' replied Father Pat with profound conviction.

'An' to win the daughter, sor,' asked Mr. O'Ryan, with his former legal insistence, 'is, I presoom, to win the father?'

'Well,' returned Father Pat hesitatingly, 'I suppose so. I should say so.'

Mr. O'Ryan waved his hand.

'Enough,' said he. 'Let no more be said. There are diplomitists, and there are not diplomi tists. The wurruld's wide.'

Father Pat gave a covert glance of admiration at his companion, but, vouchsafing no reply save a grumbling 'Ay, ay,' walked more sturdily on.

A little further ahead they saw Farmer Kennedy

himself, in his shirt-sleeves, shutting a gate behind a man who was driving some cows across the fields to the farm buildings. Mr. O'Ryan cried 'Hello!' Farmer Kennedy, observing the two friends, folded his arms on the top bar of the gate. Leaving the highroad, they entered the lane leading to where the farmer stood. As they went along, Mr. O'Ryan, pulling his reverence by the sleeve, said in an undertone:

'Now, sor, soft an' aisy does it.'

There was some need for this caution, as Father Pat, the nearer he approached Farmer Kennedy, began to blow his breath ominously, and to grow redder in the face.

'God be wid yir rivirence,' said Mr. Kennedy, raising his hat. 'An' you, sor,' to Mr. O'Ryan, 'I hope I see you in good health?'

Mr. O'Ryan thrust his hand through the bars of the gate.

'I ricipricate yir good fellaship, sor,' said he. 'I'm always glad, sor, to mate a thrue Irishman—whither a poor pesint or a rich farmer.'

Father Pat, taking a handkerchief from his hat, vigorously rubbed his face and bald head. Then he exclaimed:

'Well, now, as time's short an' I don't want to bate about the bush——'

'Aisy, aisy!' murmured Mr. O'Ryan.

'To make a long story short,' said Father Pat, 'we want you to jine the Lague.'

'What lague, yir rivirence?' asked Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. O'Ryan groaned.

'Shure you don't mane to say,' exclaimed Father Pat impatiently, 'you haven't heard how we've established a branch iv the Lague in Ballycusha?'

Farmer Kennedy, resting his arms on the gate, stared blankly at Father Pat for several moments. Then he drew in a deep breath, took his arm off the gate, rubbed down his shirt-sleeves with his palms, and, finally, looked again at Father Pat.

'Shure, axin' yir rivirence's pardin,' said he, 'the divil a wurrud I heard tell iv it till this moment.'

'Glory be to God!' said Father Pat. 'Where have you been?'

'Well, yir rivirence,' replied the farmer with marked slowness, 'the fact is, I've bin where I always am, an' that is, thryin' to keep things together. The times nivir were so bad for farmin' to my recollection; an' it's as much as I can do to make both inds meet. There's no sellin' cattle now like the ould times, an', shure, the hay's lost wid the wet. It gives me as much as I can do, yir rivirence, to kape me head above wather, divil a lie I'm tellin' you!'

'Bedad, an' if you were to talk to dooms-

day——' began Father Pat, but Mr. O'Ryan soothingly raised his hand.

'Misther Kennedy,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'no man, sor, who is obsarvint iv the condition iv the Irish markits can deny yir assertions. But what, sor, is the raisin iv the dipresshin? Come, sor, I put it to you as a man iv discarnmint, what's the raisin?'

'Bad weather, belike,' replied the farmer.

'Ay, partly,' resumed Mr. O'Ryan; 'but, sor, I'll tell you the chief raisin iv the disgraceful condition iv the prisint agriculturil dipresshin. In one wurrud, sor, lan'lordism.'

'Ay, ay,' observed Mr. Kennedy, turning as if to move away. 'That may be. Well, gintlemen, as I have to see the cows put up, I'll say——'

'One momint, sor,' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan. 'I ask you, sor, to throw in the weight iv yir great ability an' influence——'

'Some other time I'll talk to you,' said Mr. Kennedy, smiling feebly, and hesitating whether to go or stay. 'At prisint——'

'Man alive,' cried Father Pat, 'can't you answer a plain question? Can't you say——'

'Gintly, gintly,' murmured Mr. O'Ryan.

Father Pat turned on his companion.

'Arra, hould yir whist,' said he. 'Amn't I his priest, an' do you think I'll stand here an' let him or any man turn his back on me? Misther

Kennedy, I'm not behoulden to you for much. The parish chapil might fall to the ground for all you ivir gev to it. An' I tell you, you may go too far in neglectin' the support iv yir rilijin. I'm spakin' now as yir priest.'

'Plaze God, I'll always listen to yir rivirence wid rispict,' returned Mr. Kennedy.

'Rispict is one thing an' money another,' observed Father Pat. 'If you rispicted yir rilijin you'd support it betther.'

'Ay, to be shure,' said Mr. O'Ryan feverishly. 'Rilijin, iv coorse. Very good, yir rivirence. But, shure, it's the Nashnil Lague I understood was the objict iv our convirsation.'

'Nashnil Lague?' exclaimed Father Pat, seizing him by the sleeve. 'Come along wid you. If Misther Kennedy doesn't see his way to jine us, perhaps he'll ripint whin it's too late. Come along, man, an' don't waste yir breath.'

They went back on the cattle-track to the road.

'You were too hasty, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan bitterly.

'Ay, I lost my timpir,' said Father Pat, taking a hasty pinch of snuff. 'But, shure, I cudn't kape quiet an' see him standin' there purtindin' to be a gaum.'

Mr. Kennedy went across the fields whistling in an anxious manner to himself.

XV.

NORA ADMIRES HER FATHER.

NEXT day Farmer Kennedy showed so little of his usual buoyancy, that Nora, who was always careful of him, noticed his manner. At evening tea he slowly tapped a spoon against his empty cup as he stared vacantly at the picture of his deceased wife over the piano. From time to time Nora glanced aside at him. She observed that when Delia came in with the teapot and awkwardly knocked against him, he merely moved his chair a little without a remark. Miss Hannah, who was engrossed in her own sensations, sat with a thick shawl about her shoulders.

'Father, what is the matter with you?' asked Nora, as she poured the tea into his cup.

'Matther wid me, little woman? Why, nothin'! What should be the matther wid me?'

'You look as if something ailed you,' said she. 'Are you not well?'

'Quite well, glory be to God!' he replied.

Miss Hannah sighed deeply.

'Then why don't you take your tea?' asked Nora sharply.

Her father looked down at his cup, apparently becoming conscious of it for the first time. He balanced a spoon in his fingers as if about to stir the tea, but resumed his blank stare at the portrait instead.

Nora drank her tea for some moments. Her aunt, with unobtrusive sighs, helped herself liberally to buttered toast.

'Father, there is something the matter!' exclaimed Nora at length. 'Are any of the cows sick?'

'Cows? Wisha, no. They were never betther, thanks be to God!'

'Then, in the name of goodness, what *is* wrong?' asked Nora impatiently. But, seeing evidence of pain in his contracted brows, she instantly rose. Placing her arms round his neck, she rubbed her cheek against his. 'What is it, dear?' she whispered. 'Tell your little Nora.'

'Well, acushla macree, perhaps it's iv no importance, an' perhaps it's sarious enough.'

'Yes?' said Nora as he paused.

'Well, then, little woman, Father Pat and that friend iv his, O'Ryan, want me to jine the Lague, an'——'

'And you don't want to, father?'

'Bedad, I don't,' replied her father energetically. 'You're right there. But if I don't——'

'Well, father?'

'They may make things mighty unpleasant for me, little woman, that's all.'

'But, Joseph,' observed Miss Hannah, surprised, 'surely you could not refuse the parish priest, and such an important person as Mr. O'Ryan?'

Nora resumed her seat.

'Aunt, how can you!' said she. 'Father does not wish to join, and that's enough. And if there were fifty parish priests, and Mr. O'Ryan was the most important person in the world, they have no right to dictate to my father.'

'Dear child, you are young,' said Miss Hannah, sighing. 'You talk so wildly!'

'Well, I know this,' returned Nora angrily: 'I hope father will have no dealings with that man O'Ryan. Do you know, father——'

'What, little woman?'

He turned his perturbed face towards her indignant eyes.

'That man,' said Nora, 'has had the impertinence to make love to me.'

Farmer Kennedy rose. Grasping the back of the chair, he gazed speechlessly at his daughter. Nora nodded, struggling between a laugh and a sob.

'Yes, father, it is true.'

Miss Hannah's face crimsoned.

'Upon my word!' she exclaimed, 'the impertinence is all on your side, Nora. The idea of that man—that most eloquent man!—making love to a chit of a——'

'Silence!' roared Mr. Kennedy. He turned so savagely on his sister that she left the room in tears. Nora seemed inclined to follow, in order to comfort her aunt, but he stopped her. 'Nivir mind her, little woman,' said he. 'She's a fool! Tell me,' he added, putting his hands into his pockets as he sat down, 'are you jokin' wid yir father, little woman?'

'No, father,' replied Nora earnestly. 'It's true. He wants to court me. The——' She looked round the room with flashing eyes, then said between her teeth, 'The beast!'

Mr. Kennedy placed his fist heavily on the table.

'Glory be to God!' said he.

Nora, swiftly wiping her eyes with the backs of her hands, tossed her hair as she burst into a laugh.

'It doesn't matter, father,' said she, resuming her seat. 'Don't bother about it. Take your tea.'

He looked solemnly at his huge fist, then as solemnly at his daughter.

'Little woman,' said he slowly, 'if that man

ivir attempts to make love to you, I'll cowhide him within an inch iv his life—the varmint!'

There was a knock at the door. Mr. O'Ryan entered, looking round with a genial smile. He had his hat and umbrella in one hand, a pair of gloves in the other.

'In good ould Irish fashin,' said he, 'God save all here!'

Farmer Kennedy, with menacing face, had risen from his chair. But Nora had her arms about his shoulders, pressing him down.

'Father dear,' she whispered, 'take care. Don't forget yourself!' She turned her head, saying quickly: 'Father is not very well this evening, Mr. O'Ryan. Can you—could you call again?'

'Let me go, Nora,' said her father hoarsely.

'Oh, do be quiet. There!' exclaimed Nora, laughing, as she thrust him down into the seat. 'Be a good boy, and don't worry the little woman.'

Mr. Kennedy gazed sternly at Mr. O'Ryan, who was looking affectionately at Nora.

'Well, sor,' said the farmer, 'state yir business. As my daughter says, I am not very well. But I can spare a momint or so.'

'I am thruly sorry, belave me, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'to find you in indiffirint health, but I will not inthrude meself on yir society, or that iv yir charmin' daughter——'

'Don't mind my daughter, sor,' said Mr. Kennedy angrily.

'Oh, father!' said Nora pleadingly. She was standing behind him, her arms on his shoulders. She looked proudly across at Mr. O'Ryan, who, though vaguely conscious that he was the cause of the trouble, never lost his diplomatic smile.

'Sor,' said he, 'I just dhropped in on me way to Father Pat's, to know if you had bin turnin' over our racint convirsation in yir mind? A man iv your influence, sor, iv your connections, iv your massive an' importint carracter, sor, is indispinsible to the nashnil cause in Ballycusha.'

Mr. Kennedy raised his hand.

'Stop!' he exclaimed. 'I've thought over our convirsation; an' I've to tell you, Misther O'Ryan, an' you can tell Father Pat from me, that I will not jine the Lague. There, now, I've said me say.'

Nora softly patted her father on the back. Mr. O'Ryan scratched his chin with a rapid motion of his fingers, transferring the weight of his body from one foot to the other.

'I'm sorry, sor,' said he, 'that I'll have to tell his rivirence——'

'What have you to tell his rivirence?' exclaimed Father Pat, entering suddenly and looking sternly round.

Farmer Kennedy started tremblingly, but Nora pressed her hands firmly on his broad shoulders. Bending down, she whispered:

'Courage, father!'

Mr. Kennedy put up his hands to grasp those of his daughter as they rested close to his neck.

'Father Pat,' said he, 'you're welcome. Won't you be sated?'

'I'll be sated or I won't be sated,' said Father Pat, 'just accordin' to what I hear. I've come now to ax you whether you'll jine the Lague or not?'

'Then, yir rivirence, wid due rispict to you, I'll not,' replied Mr. Kennedy.

'Bravo, father!' murmured Nora. Her father opened his hands slightly, closing them on hers again. The veins in Father Pat's neck swelled.

'Then, sor, I decline to take a sate in yir house,' he exclaimed. 'If you choose to set yirsilf up agin yir priest——'

'I beg pardin, yir rivirence,' interrupted Mr. Kennedy.

'That'll do, now,' said Father Pat. 'I don't want you to beg me pardin. I say, you've set up yir ipinions agin yir priest, an' you'll have to take the consiquinces. I've warned you before now, me frind, that yir conduct towards the support iv yir own parish church was disgracefil in a ma-

your manes, an' you've now dhruv me beyond the limit. I let you go as far as I cud. Now there's an ind iv it. Come, Ignatius. There's an ind iv it now, Misther Kennedy.'

Father Pat, as he caught Mr. O'Ryan by the sleeve, looked back menacingly at the farmer.

There was silence in the room until the hall-door closed behind the two friends. Mr. Kennedy drew in a long breath. Nora, giving him a hearty slap on the back, cried, 'Bravo, father!' Then, throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed him on the tip of the nose.

'I'm proud of you!' she exclaimed, standing back a pace to gaze admiringly at him. 'Hurrah for my father!'

She doubled her hands on her hips, put her head on one side, and nodded at him.

'Well, it's done, little woman,' said he. 'I'm detarmined I won't be led into their politics. Me, a Justiss iv the Pace an' Sir Howard's biggest tinant! No, bedad! How cud I sit on the binch wid him if I jined their lague? An' as for that O'Ryan, bedad, I haven't given me little girl the best education in France, an' got her a bran' new peana from Dublin, to let her be coorted be a——'

Mr. Kennedy made a grimace, but uttered no word. He rose shortly, saying that he would see if

the cattle were all right, but before he left the room Nora gave him another hug.

When Nora was alone she strutted round the tea-table, snapping her fingers and exclaiming triumphantly:

'Hurrah for my father!'

XVI.

BOYCOTTED.

THE following Sunday Farmer Kennedy was denounced from the altar. The congregation were thrilled with excitement, which was intensified by the silence imperative in a place of worship. Mr. Kennedy was not present. Nora whispered to her aunt to come away. Miss Hannah, making no response, sat rigid. Nora rose, walking proudly down the aisle, followed by the eyes of hundreds.

Though it was raining, she forgot to unfurl her parasol or put on her waterproof cloak. A crisis having arrived in her life, the state of the weather was of no importance. When she hurried into the sitting-room, she found her father there. Having returned from the stables, he was putting on a dry Sunday coat for dinner. Nora threw her parasol with the cloak on the sofa.

'Oh, father!' she cried.

'What's the matther, little woman?'

'You've been denounced, father!'

'Denounced?'

'Yes. From the altar!'

Mr. Kennedy turned pale.

'Glory be to God!' said he.

'Yes,' exclaimed Nora breathlessly, 'Father Pat has denounced you! I rose and walked out. I wanted aunt to come. She wouldn't; she was dazed. I rose and walked out. All the people stared. I was going to snap my fingers at them. Father Pat denounced you!'

He put a hand behind his back, groping for a chair, which he pulled towards him. He sat down, grasping his knees as he gazed speechlessly at his daughter. His mouth had become suddenly dry. He crushed his lips once or twice with his palm. Nora took off her hat. Shaking the rain from it, she examined the feather with the tips of her fingers.

'Yes, father,' she continued, 'aunt was the picture of death. Father Pat stood up in his robes. His language was horrible! I thought I'd stand up and say, "You're a liar, and if my father was here——" but I didn't. Oh, that O'Ryan! He sat——'

'Denounced!' murmured Mr. Kennedy.

'In the front seat. The wretch! I wish I could have scratched his face. I knew he did it

all. Yes, he's at the bottom of it. Aunt was terribly frightened.'

'From the altar,' muttered Mr. Kennedy slowly to himself.

Nora, throwing her hat aside, pulled off her wet gloves.

'Well, we'll fight it out!' she exclaimed. 'We're not slaves. Oh, how I wish Father Pat was in France! Mon Dieu!'

'I've bin born here,' observed Mr. Kennedy generally. 'I've bin reared here. I've bin man, boy, an' child in Ballycusha. An' now I'm——'

He could not say the word. He seemed so stunned that the tears rushed to Nora's eyes. Kneeling before him, she stroked his gray hair, placing her face against his arm.

'Don't worry over it, father dear. It'll all come right. Anyhow, whatever happens, don't give in. I wouldn't let O'Ryan be the victor for all I'm worth!'

'I mustn't give in,' said he. 'I can't go agin me lan'lord. I'm in his debt——'

Nora opened her eyes widely.

'In his debt, father?'

Taking her hand, he slowly shook his head.

'Little woman,' said he, 'don't fret about that. Sir Howard knows me. We both sit on the same

binch. An' there's another thing: can I jine their Lague, an' me a Justiss iv the Pace?'

'Certainly not, sir.'

'An' this Lague iv theirs mayn't hould out a month,' he soliloquized, consoling himself.

'Of course not.'

'Denounced,' said he, adding slowly, 'from the althar. Glory be to God!'

She stroked his hair a little harder, clinging close as if to protect him.

The door opened. Aunt Hannah stepped in, her face haggard, her clothes drenched.

She sank exhausted into the nearest chair.

'Oh, Joseph!' said she.

'Take off your wet things, aunt,' said Nora.

'Don't trouble me about wet things,' returned her aunt. 'Oh dear! oh dear! What is to become of us? I see you know all, Joseph. I don't know how I got home, and the people hooting me. I'm wet to the skin. What will become of us?'

Nora brusquely rose.

'Never mind,' said she. 'You can't mend matters. Take off your wet things.' She felt her aunt's cloak. 'Why, you're wringing wet! Take off your cloak, aunt. Dinner is just ready.'

Miss Hannah, having untied her cloak, sank back after the effort.

'Dinner?' she moaned. 'Don't talk to me of dinner, child; I couldn't taste a bit. Joseph, you will have to join the League.'

Nora confronted her aunt.

'Never!' she shrieked. 'Don't you say that. Father shall not join the League. Never, never, never! Will you, father?'

She turned swiftly towards him. He had been gazing wearily at the carpet, his hands still on his knees. He looked up.

'Jine the Lague, little woman?' said he. 'No, never!'

Miss Hannah rose.

'Then we are lost!' she exclaimed. 'I must go to my room. I am drenched to the skin. We are lost! Oh, what shall we do? Lost!' she muttered, as she ascended the stairs, 'in this world and the next.'

Throughout that evening Mr. Kennedy was gloomy. Nora, who secretly enjoyed the situation, found considerable difficulty in showing sympathy to her aunt. Eventually Miss Hannah retired to her bed, where she prayed herself to sleep. The servants conversed in whispers.

It was morning before Nora fell asleep. At dawn her father was about. When he went downstairs, he found the cook alone in the kitchen. He bade her a good-morning, which she faintly

returned. He proceeded to the yard. As he crossed to the stables, he met Mike coming out. Mike had a coat over his shoulders, buttoned at the throat. He attempted to evade his master, but Mr. Kennedy stopped him.

'Where are you goin'?' he asked.

'Goin', sor? Well, sor——'

Mike stooped to pick up a straw, which he put into his mouth. He shuffled his feet about, looking over Mr. Kennedy's head towards the garden-gate. Mr. Kennedy laid his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder.

'Can't you answer a plain question, Mike?' said he. 'I nivir knew it was a habit iv yours to bate about the bush.'

'No, sor, nor it isn't.'

Mike looked helpless in his master's strong grasp.

'Well, then, where are you goin', I ax agin?'

Mike looked down at his feet, then suddenly stared at the sky.

'Bedad, sor,' he replied with an effort, 'I have to go.'

'Have to go, Mike?'

'Ay, troth, sor, it's sorry I am. I've served you, sor, faithful fifteen year, an' it's no pleasure for me to go, sor. I hope you won't think hard iv me,

sor?' Mike looked up piteously. 'I can't help it, sor. I've got ordhers to go.'

'An' who dare give ordhers on my farm?' asked Mr. Kennedy sternly.

Mike took the straw from his mouth to look reproachfully at it.

'Well, sor,' said he, 'I'm not allowed to say, sor. But, sor, Father Pat—— I suppose you know, sor, what happened yestherda afther Mass?'

Mr. Kennedy nodded, setting his teeth together.

'It's not my fault, sor,' said Mike. 'It's as hard on me, sor, as you. Where will I git as good a place?'

'I'm not axin' you to lave yir place,' observed Mr. Kennedy so sternly that Mike started.

'Shure, I know that, sor. An' there's no man I'd rather sarve undher. But shure, sor, you wouldn't ax me to put me sowl in danger, an', maybe, me body, too, bedad, for there's no sayin' what ud happin if I stayed.'

'All right, Mike. Good-bye!'

Mr. Kennedy, turning abruptly, walked down the stables to look at the horses in their row of stalls. When he left the stables, he walked slowly, with bent head, his hands clasped behind his back.

'Sixty years, man an' boy, in Ballycusha,' he muttered, 'and it has come to this!'

He went down to the haggard, the yards

where the cattle were lodged, the sheds where corn was packed and potatoes stored, but not a labourer was to be seen. As he returned he looked towards the windows of the farmhouse. At one of them stood Nora, who kissed hands to him, but he was too gloomy to take notice of the little woman's salutation.

Nora had no time to indulge in surprise at her father's manner. She had called her maid, Delia, several times without receiving an answer. At length she lost temper. Hastily throwing on a cloak, she ran downstairs. Hearing footsteps in the hall she hurried out. She saw Delia, dressed for walking, with a carpet-bag in one hand, a bandbox under her arm.

'Delia!' cried Nora in amazement.

Delia walked on sullenly towards the front-door, but stopped to turn round.

'Yis, miss?'

'Where are you going at this hour, in the name of goodness?'

Nora spoke from the foot of the stairs.

'At this hour, miss?'

'Good heavens, yes! at this hour.'

'Where am I goin', miss?'

Nora tapped with her foot on the mat, at the same time pressing her hand on her bosom to repress its angry heaving.

'That is the question I asked,' she replied.

'Shure, I have to go, miss.'

Setting down the bandbox, Delia searched in her dress for a handkerchief to wipe her eyes.

'Have to go! Who told you?'

'Who told me, miss?'

'Yes.'

'Shure, they're all gone, miss.'

'Bon Dieu, it is not possible!' exclaimed Nora, looking frightened.

'Bong Joo, it is thrue, miss,' said Delia, crying. 'An' I must go, too, miss. Indade, it's not me own seekin'. Shure, I hope you won't think hard iv me, miss.'

Nora strode towards her.

'Think hard of you?' she exclaimed. 'I never thought much of you, and I think less of you now. Why should I think well of you when you run away like a coward, just when father and I needed help? Here, don't bother about your tears. Go!'

Opening the door as widely as possible, she pointed sternly out. Delia, taking up her bandbox, glanced with downcast eyes at her mistress.

'Shure, miss——' she began.

'Go!' cried Nora, stamping her foot.

Delia hastened out. Her skirts were barely free of the step, when Nora banged the door.

With head erect, Nora walked into the kitchen.

Here she threw aside her cloak. Turning up the sleeves of her morning dress to the elbows, she fastened on a big, rough apron, and began to prepare breakfast.

She was busily engaged, when her father entered from the yard. He stood looking with sorrowful surprise at her.

'Well, father?' said she brightly.

'No one here, aither?' said he. 'All gone?'

'All gone, and so much the better. Mon Dieu, we don't want cowards here!'

He walked towards the fireplace, but halted, looking round with indecision.

'They've made a sthranger iv me,' said he, 'in me own place. Ay, now's the time I know what it is not to have a son.'

Nora was in the act of placing a frying-pan with rashers and eggs on the fire. As he spoke, she paused, holding the pan for a moment poised over the coals. Her eyes were full of tears when she turned her head as her father left the kitchen. Hastily wiping her eyes with the backs of her hands, she ran towards him. Seizing him by the arm, she turned him round. He looked down gloomily at her.

'I say, father!'

'What is it, child?'

'Would you mind giving the little woman a kiss?'

She stood on tiptoe, pursing her mouth. He

bent down, pressing his bearded lips to her face. As he did so, she gently patted his cheek. Then he went quietly through the hall, and Nora hastened back to the rashers and eggs, which were noisily spluttering on the pan.

She laid breakfast in the sitting-room, where her father moodily sat, his arms folded, his chin on his breast. She slapped him on the shoulder, telling him to making a hearty meal. As he drew his chair to the table he looked round.

'Where's yir aunt?' he asked.

'Upstairs in bed. She's not very well. I'll bring her breakfast to her by-and-by.'

'Ay, ay,' he muttered. 'She's not much use whin she's wanted.'

He ate a good breakfast. Nora, as she sipped her tea, kept urging him to eat more, striving at the same time to distract his thoughts with a description of Delia's departure. When Mr. Kennedy had finished, he sat back from the table.

'Well,' said he, sighing, 'I've a big day's work and all alone. Glory be to God!'

Nora jumped up to get his coat. When he was shaking himself in it before leaving, she stood aside. After several heroic efforts to repress her emotions, she burst into tears, sobbing violently. Mr. Kennedy turned to stare at her with profound amazement.

'Why, little woman——' he began.

She suddenly threw herself into his arms, clinging to his neck.

'Are you very sorry I'm a girl, father?' she asked piteously.

'Oh!' said he, enlightened, 'shure, you're betther than fifty boys, little woman.'

As he bent down to kiss her, she looked up tearfully.

'It's not my fault I'm a girl, father,' said she.

'No, acushla. There, there, dry yir purty eyes, Nora. You're betther than fifty boys.'

Giving him a grateful hug, she turned brightly to clear the breakfast-table.

As Mr. Kennedy went out to the stable-yard, he muttered to himself:

'It's a quare world, glory be to God!'

XVII.

MISS HANNAH DESERTS.

DURING the first week of the boycott Nora was in a state of pleasurable excitement. She slept little, frequently waking with the affrighted consciousness of having forgotten some of the day's duties. Gradually, as the novelty wore away, a profound sense of loneliness succeeded. Her aunt, who spent most of her time simulating prostration, was worse than useless. Nora had to milk the cows as well as perform the household duties. Her high spirits fell. Several of the cows died from neglect. Mr. Kennedy attempted to sell some of the cattle, but, as they were boycotted, he was forced to drive them back from the market. Occasionally he got a man from another district to do a day's work, but, invariably, the next day the man was absent. He wrote for emergency men, and was promised half a dozen, but they never arrived.

It became impossible to obtain goods from the Ballycusha shops. The shopkeepers refused no

orders, but they found excuses for not executing them. When Nora went into the town, the people in the streets made no sign of recognition, the shopkeepers declined to listen to her. As a last resource, she went to the White Horse Hotel to see Mrs. Rafferty, who had always been kind to her. But when Mrs. Rafferty became aware that Nora was in the hotel, she escaped by a back-door.

Nora returned almost disheartened, but as she entered the kitchen she forgot her misery. Old Martha was seated near the fire, in bonnet and shawl, a carpet-bag at her feet. She had been patiently listening to a severe lecture from Miss Hannah, who, with a strip of red flannel round her face, stood confronting her. When the old woman saw Nora, she rose, crying 'Pigeon!'

Nora threw her arms round her nurse, kissing the furrowed cheek with rapture.

'Oh, Martha, dear Martha, it is so good of you to come!'

Old Martha relapsed into her chair, rocking herself.

Nora knelt before her, stroking her hands.

'Oh yes, it's hard, isn't it, nursie? But we have only to face it. Won't you take off your bonnet? Let me take it off.' She took it off as she spoke. 'You must stop and have a cup of [illegible] and to see you again, nursie!'

Martha looked up. Nora stood gazing delightedly down at her. The old woman, taking the girl's hands, pressed them to her shrunken lips.

'I've come, kitten,' said she, 'to stay.'

'To stay, nursie?' exclaimed Nora, enraptured.

'Yes,' observed Miss Hannah, speaking with stern distinctness from the opposite side of the table. 'I am shocked at her conduct. I was just telling her what I thought of it, before you came in. I never heard such an outrageous thing in my life—to desert her parish-priest; to leave his house; to leave the sacred precincts of a comfortable home; to leave that aged and anointed man without one to care for his wants. Oh,' exclaimed Miss Hannah, throwing up her hands, 'it is like an awful dream!'

Old Martha, crushing her fingers on Nora's wrists, looked steadfastly into the girl's eyes.

'Me darlin',' said she, 'whin I heard iv the way you'd bin thrated, shure me heart melted. It was wrong iv me ivir to lave you, dearie, but I'll stay here now if it was only a crust you had for me. An', shure, I've bin thinkin' no harrum cud come to me sowl if yir innicent hands closed me poor ould eyes whin I died.'

'The divil a die you'll die, Martha!' roared Mr. Kennedy, who, entering from the yard, noisily wiped his big boots on the scraper. 'Give me yir

hand, mavrone; you'll stay here many a happy year yit, plaze God!'

He smiled as he stretched forth his huge hand to her.

'Arra, shure, sor,' said she joyfully. 'I knew it; I knew you had the good heart always, let them say what they will.'

Mr. Kennedy snapped his fingers.

'Ay, ay,' cried he. 'Let them say what they will. I'll bate thim yet wid all their lies; an' here's the little woman to stand be me side.'

'Although she's not a boy, father?' said Nora.

She laid her head on his shoulder as he put his arm round her waist to draw her close. He kissed her on the forehead.

'Betther than fifty boys!' said he.

'My mind's made up!' exclaimed Miss Hannah, who had been glaring fiercely at Martha.

'Hullo, Hannah!' said Mr. Kennedy, turning towards her. 'Down out iv bed at last? Well, now you'll be able to lind Nora a hand about the house.'

'My mind's made up,' said Miss Hannah, advancing, with a strange light in her eyes.

Mr. Kennedy, still holding his daughter round the waist, receded a step as his sister advanced.

'What's the matther, Hannah?' he asked, alarmed by her manner.

'It shan't be said,' said Miss Hannah, shaking her head at Martha, 'that the anointed priest of the parish was left to starve by an ingrate, and to mend his own clothes. That shan't be said while I'm alive. No, thank God! I'm not a heathen.'

'Glory be to God,' said Mr. Kennedy, 'what's wrong?'

His sister, without answering, walked out of the kitchen. They heard her mounting the stairs with emphatic footsteps. Mr. Kennedy walked to the fireplace, turning his back on it. He put his arms under his coat-tails. In this attitude he stared with speechless wonderment at his daughter. After a few moments' deep silence, he said questioningly:

'She can't——?'

'Oh yes, she is, father,' replied Nora, bitterly if ungrammatically.

'No, no, I won't belave it,' said he, striking his right fist into the palm of his left hand; 'she wudn't disgrace the name.'

Nora jumped up on the table, swinging her feet beside Martha.

'Father dear,' said she, 'don't deceive yourself. Aunt intends it; I saw it in her face.'

Mr. Kennedy knit his brows.

'To go over to the inimy,' he muttered—'to the

man that made a sthranger iv me in the house iv me fathers.'

'To the men,' said Nora with increased bitterness. 'Mr. O'Ryan is there still — isn't he, nursie?'

She turned questioningly to Martha, who, nodding her head, made a tragic grimace.

'Indade he is, dear; God forgive him!' said the old woman.

Miss Hannah was heard coming downstairs. They did not speak until she appeared at the kitchen door. She walked towards her brother, holding out her hand.

'Good-bye, Joseph,' said she.

He looked at her from head to foot.

'Where are you goin', Hannah?' he asked with deliberation.

Miss Hannah's face crimsoned.

'I'm going to housekeep for Father Pat. God would not forgive me if I did not go to his assistance. Brother, I've done my duty for twenty long years here. I asked no thanks. I got none. You have elected to go against the will of your priest. I cannot and will not abet you in such sacrilege.'

'Hannah Kennedy,' said her brother sternly, 'are you goin' over to the inimy?'

'He is no enemy!' exclaimed his sister indig-

nantly. 'Are you not afraid that the lightning will strike you for uttering such impiety? Joseph,' she added pleadingly, 'let us part friends. I'll talk to Father Pat and get him to stop the boycott. I'll——'

'Hannah Kennedy,' exclaimed the farmer, 'is that yir hand? Put it up, woman. It 'll nivir shake mine while I live. Go yir way where an' how you plaze, but nivir darken my door agin!'

He turned his back on her, sternly staring into the fire. Miss Hannah went towards Nora. Nora put her hands behind her back, disdainfully turning away her head. Miss Hannah, bursting into tears, moved to the door.

'I expected this!' said she. 'Base ingratitude! This is my thanks for having made a slave of myself, for having denied myself everything to be a servant to my brother and his daughter. But there is One above who knows my heart, and may He forgive you both!'

She went out. Not a word was spoken in the kitchen until they heard the front-door closed. Then Nora slid off the table. She walked gently to her father, who, with folded arms, was still staring at the fire. Laying her hand on his shoulder, she looked up into his face.

'Father.'

He did not reply. She said again:

'Father dear.'

He started. Turning, he took both her hands in his. He did not speak, but his face was set.

'It will all come right, father darling,' whispered Nora.

He took her face between his hands, kissing it as he laughed hoarsely.

'Ay, ay, little woman,' said he; 'I'll go up and lie down a bit on the sofa. It'll all come right in time,' he muttered, as he moved slowly away.

When he was gone, Nora rushed to Martha's arms to sob there, while her old nurse rocked her to and fro, crooning over her as in the old days when Nora was a little child.

XVIII.

VAL TO THE RESCUE.

A FEW days later Martha was busy in the kitchen, when a young man suddenly entered from the yard. Slapping a whip on his gaiters, he cried:

'Hark away! Tally-ho!'

Old Martha looked up from her dishes. Raising her hands as high as her shoulders, she grinned with pleasure.

'Arra, Masther Val,' she exclaimed, 'is that yirself?'

'Faith, and I hope it's no one else,' said Val. He cracked his whip as he seated himself on the table. 'And I hope you're glad to see me.'

Martha briskly wiped her hands in her apron.

'Indade, Masther Val, it does me ould eyes good to see you. An' there's someone else 'll be glad too, I warrant,' she added with confidential slyness.

'But how did you come to be here?' asked Val quickly. 'Have you left Father Pat?'

'Shure I have, sor,' she replied, turning to the dishes.

'Well, I thought you'd end your days with him,' said he.

The old woman made no reply. He whistled awhile as he examined the thong of his whip, then abruptly said, with assumed indifference:

'By the way, where's Miss Nora? Not ill, I hope?'

She placed her hands on the table, shaking her head solemnly at him.

'Well, Masther Val,' said she, 'between oursilves, Miss Nora's not ill be the right manin' iv the tarm. What I mane to say, she's not that ill that she has to take to her bed. God bless her, it's in her bed the child ought to be; but she can't afford to go to bed, sor, an' that's the long an' short iv it. An' between oursilves, sor, they'll dhrive her to her bed, the poor child! if things go on much farther——'

'Good God!' said Val. 'This is a bad state of affairs.'

'Ay, troth. It's quare times.'

'Where is she? Could I see her for a moment? Is she anywhere about?'

'Troth, thin, sor, not to tell a lie about it,' said old Martha briskly, 'it's upstairs she is this minit dustin' the furnitur. But I'll go an' call her, sor, an' glad the swate young cratur 'll be to see you.'

XVII.

MISS HANNAH DESERTS.

DURING the first week of the boycott Nora was in a state of pleasurable excitement. She slept little, frequently waking with the affrighted consciousness of having forgotten some of the day's duties. Gradually, as the novelty wore away, a profound sense of loneliness succeeded. Her aunt, who spent most of her time simulating prostration, was worse than useless. Nora had to milk the cows as well as perform the household duties. Her high spirits fell. Several of the cows died from neglect. Mr. Kennedy attempted to sell some of the cattle, but, as they were boycotted, he was forced to drive them back from the market. Occasionally he got a man from another district to do a day's work, but, invariably, the next day the man was absent. He wrote for emergency men, and was promised half a dozen, but they never arrived.

It became impossible to obtain goods from the Ballycusha shops. The shopkeepers refused no

orders, but they found excuses for not executing them. When Nora went into the town, the people in the streets made no sign of recognition, the shopkeepers declined to listen to her. As a last resource, she went to the White Horse Hotel to see Mrs. Rafferty, who had always been kind to her. But when Mrs. Rafferty became aware that Nora was in the hotel, she escaped by a back-door.

Nora returned almost disheartened, but as she entered the kitchen she forgot her misery. Old Martha was seated near the fire, in bonnet and shawl, a carpet-bag at her feet. She had been patiently listening to a severe lecture from Miss Hannah, who, with a strip of red flannel round her face, stood confronting her. When the old woman saw Nora, she rose, crying 'Pigeon!'

Nora threw her arms round her nurse, kissing the furrowed cheek with rapture.

'Oh, Martha, dear Martha, it is so good of you to come!'

Old Martha relapsed into her chair, rocking herself.

Nora knelt before her, stroking her hands.

'Oh yes, it's hard, isn't it, nursie? But we have only to face it. Won't you take off your bonnet? Let me take it off.' She took it off as she spoke. 'You must stop and have a cup of tea. It's grand to see you again, nursie!'

her hands. She would have let him if he had tried a little harder, but he did not.

'Ah, you cruel girl!' said he.

She glanced archly at him with undisguised love in her eyes, then ran into the kitchen, whither he followed her. Old Martha stared from one to the other.

'Shure, it's well you come, Masther Val,' said she. 'You've brought the colour to her cheeks, anyhow.'

'Martha, don't be foolish!' said Nora, turning her face from Val's eyes.

'Troth, thin, there's nothin' to be ashamed iv!' said Martha stoutly. 'Masther Val is a dacent young gintleman, an' was rale sorry to hear you were ill.'

Val felt indignant with the old woman for having seen through his assumed indifference. But the next moment, turning to Nora, he felt interested.

'I'm not ill. What rubbish!' said Nora.

Then Val's heart smote him. He saw in her pale face, in her rough costume, and even in the broom, traces of the tyranny of the boycott. Here, he thought, was a beautiful young girl, rendered weak and unhandsome by a conspiracy of wretches. When he heard her detail their privations, and listened to her defiant words, he loved her more ardently than ever.

'I wish my governor could see her now!' he thought.

He became aware that it was possible for a woman to be a heroine though reduced to the condition of a maid-of-all-work—a revelation which seemed to him a sudden advance in his mental development. He solemnly placed his hand on her shoulder.

'Nora,' said he, 'I'll stand by you, and so will the governor.'

'Troth, it's a fine pair you look, anyhow, thank God!' exclaimed Martha, admiring them from the fireplace.

They had been looking into each other's eyes. They now turned abruptly round. Nora blushed, releasing her arm from Val's grasp, then looked suddenly out of the window.

'Oh, here's father!' she cried.

She ran to the door to hold up her face. Taking her by the chin, her father pressed the morning kiss on her forehead. She walked him into the kitchen, with her arm through his.

'Here's Master Val, father!'

'Shure, little woman,' said Mr. Kennedy, laughing, 'I saw him this morning before you were up. Ay, troth! Martha, is brekfist ready? Be the tare in me coat, I'm that hungry I cud ate a whole

cow. Masther Val is it? Shure enough. Little woman, I suppose he didn't tell you——'

'No, father, what?'

'"No, father, what?"' repeated Mr. Kennedy, turning towards Val to laugh as he sat down, stretching his legs. 'D'you hear her? "No, father, what?" Well, well. He's brought two men from the Castle, little woman.'

'Two men, father?'

'Ay, "two men, father." An' two dacent, square-shouldered lads, father,' said Mr. Kennedy, taking Nora on his knee. 'There's frin'ship for you if you like. I always thought Sir Howard a gintleman. An' bedad, he's proved it! There's a weight off yir father's mind, little woman, this morn, glory be to God!'

She stroked the creases out of his forehead.

'Poor father!' said she.

'And that reminds me,' exclaimed Val, jumping from the table, 'the governor gave me strict orders to make myself useful. I'll go out to the stables and do some work for once in my life.'

'Oh, Val!' cried Nora. 'You? What nonsense!'

Val took off his coat, throwing it on a chair.

'Nonsense or no nonsense, Nora,' said he, 'I've got to obey the governor. See you again!'

He went out. Nora watched him pass the

window towards the stables, whistling. She turned to stare at her father, who nodded triumphantly.

'There, little woman. We have some frinds in the wurruld, afther all, glory be to God! Martha, you ould haythen, is that cow ready?'

Martha, with an energy which would have been creditable in a woman half her age, soon had breakfast served. Later on Val appeared for a cup of tea. Mr. Kennedy left him to Nora at the breakfast table.

Val sat in his shirt-sleeves, with the odour of the stables about him. When Nora passed to refill his plate or move a cup, he insisted on kissing her, to which she made no objection. They finished breakfast with their chairs close together. Martha, entering unexpectedly, grinned benevolently, and asked the Lord to bless them.

Throughout the subsequent days, whilst Val acted as farm hand, he found time for many affectionate interviews with Nora. The colour returned to her face. Val being on the premises, she was radiantly happy. But she took care that he never saw her looking like a housemaid again.

A few days later, further assistance appeared. Norah was helping Martha in the kitchen, when she heard a deferential cough at the door. She saw the old peasant, Paddy, pulling at his white hair as he shuffled his feet

'Why, it's Paddy!' exclaimed Nora.

'If yir honour's ladyship plazes, I've come to do a sthroke iv work. Ould Paddy.'

'Why, Paddy, I'm very glad to see you!'

'Yir honour's ladyship. God save all here, if you plaze. Widout offence; Herself—she tould me, yir honour.'

'Well, Paddy, sit down and have something to eat, and then you can go and weed the garden——'

'Or clane the knives,' suggested Martha.

'Yes, or clean the knives,' said Nora. 'We'll find something for you to do, Paddy. Sit down.'

'May the saints in glory——' began old Paddy. But Nora, catching sight of Val crossing the yard ran upstairs to brush her hair.

XIX.

OLD PADDY OPENS THE DOOR.

OLD Paddy, when he left the farm that evening, shook himself like a water dog. He had received two shillings for his day's work. He placed the coins in his palm to look at them with his head aside. Then he shook himself again before starting for the town. As he went along he talked to himself about Larry, the flag of distress, and Herself. At intervals he stopped to stare at the coins. When he entered the town he looked carefully at the articles in the shop windows. On the thresholds he would hesitate, setting off again at an amble. Having traversed the town, he turned back, repeating the process. Occasionally a boy yelled, 'Oul' Brooms!' Others threw handfuls of mud at him, but, accustomed to being worried by the street boys, he took no notice. Finally, he went into a shop to change his two shillings, in order to have as many coppers as possible to satiate the rapacity of Herself. But the

shopman, looking sternly at him, said, 'You worked for the Kennedys; get out o' this!' Paddy went away wondering. He entered another shop, where he received the same salute. Wherever he went for change he heard the same accusation. He attempted to make a few small purchases, but no one in the town would sell him anything. At length he was chased on to the highroad by a yelling crowd of youngsters, with the approval of their elders.

Night approached when he began to ascend the Cusha mountain. He sometimes stopped, seeming to hear the inexplicable formula, 'You worked for the Kennedys!' ringing in his ears. It was blowing a gale; he was hustled about by the wind, which sometimes forced him against a rock, where he would steady himself, holding tightly to his hat. As he again proceeded, the wind came howling at him. He thought it said, 'You worked for the Kennedys; get out o' this!'

He never remembered taking so long to climb the Cusha heights. The wind kept him back; the way was clear enough, the moonlight being startlingly bright. When he paused to fetch his breath, he looked up. The moon seemed dancing as it dyed the scudding clouds in prismatic colours. When he reached the summit, he looked across the roaring Atlantic for America. He thought he

caught a glimpse of New York, but the hastening clouds constantly blotted it out. As he said to himself, 'It's a quare night, anyhow,' the wind seemed to shriek in reply, 'You worked for the Kennedys; get out o' this!'

But he entered his hovel, crying bravely, 'God save all here!' There was not much to save except Herself, who lay on a bundle of old sacks in a corner, ill with rheumatism.

'Ah, you've come back,' she exclaimed. 'Hard ould man!'

Paddy closed the door, rolling the stone against it with his foot. He knelt before the small heap of smouldering turf to untie his wallet, thrusting into the outstretched claw-like hand of his wife some broken bread and meat. She attacked it ravenously, muttering as she ate. The little black bottle which he produced she instantly put to her lips.

'A hard ould man. Where's the money? Where's Larry's letther?'

He gave her the coins. She bit them between her gums, then flung them at him.

'Two bits iv money!' she cried. 'Och, wurra! let me die. Two bits iv money for a day's work!'

Picking the shillings from the floor, he put them in his pocket, before poking the turf fire with a stick.

'There's a dark ould cratur for you!' said he.

'Throws away two gowld American coins worth a pound iv money. Shure, the poor cratur doesn't know what she's doin'. "Paddy," ses Miss Nora to me—"Paddy," ses she, "I know you'd like to be paid in American money," ses she, "becase," ses she, "I hard yir son is in the States." "Shure enough, yir honour's ladyship," ses I. "Hould out yir fist, Paddy," ses she, "an' take hould iv these gowld coins," ses she; "for," ses she, "I know Herself 'll be glad iv American money; it's tin times betther nor English money," ses she. Ah, shure,' said Paddy with disgust, 'there's no makin' a poor, dark, ignorint cratur undherstand'

Old Biddy stretched forth her starved arm.

'Hand me thim coins agin,' said she. 'Let me fale thim.'

When he gave her the coins she bit them again.

'Shure enough, they're not copper, anyhow,' said she, hiding them under the sacks.

She resumed her feast of bread and meat. Paddy, being tired, stretched himself before the fire with his face on his arms. The turf faintly glowed on his wife as she lay huddled on the sacks. The wind shook the rafters.

'Where's Larry's letther?' she asked.

Old Paddy snored.

'Where's Larry's letther?' she cried in a louder tone, but Paddy slept on.

When she had finished her supper, she repeated the question. Receiving no reply, she groped near her bed until she found her stick, with which she vigorously prodded Paddy's legs.

'Is it aslape y' are,' she exclaimed, 'you hard ould man? Where's Larry's letther, I say?'

He grunted, rolling over. Another prod made him sit up to rub his legs.

'Larry's letther?' he repeated.

'Ay, shure. D'you think it's dirty money you wint in to get?'

Scratching his head, he looked gloomily at the fire.

'Shure, thin, there was no letther,' said he.

The old woman, seizing her hair with both hands, made preparations for a fit.

'No letther!' she shrieked.

'Hould on a minit,' said Paddy, realizing his mistake. Then he added slowly: 'There was no letther from Larry at the post-office. But, there was betther than that——'

'Betther than that?'

'Ay. There was a telegraft.'

'A tele——'

Paddy drew a remnant of an old newspaper from his bosom.

'I've got it here,' said he—'a telegraft. That's betther nor a letther. It comes faster. Maybe you nivir heard tell iv a telegraft, now?'

'Arrah, what is it at all? Shure, I nivir heard iv the like.'

'See that, now!' said he. 'There's a dark ould ignorant cratur! Shure, such a thing wasn't known in yir time nor in mine naythur, for the matther iv that.'

She sat up, slowly rubbing her rheumatic limbs, her face turned expectantly towards him.

'What is it, at all?' she asked.

'Shure, thin, it's a kind of letther, an' it's not a letther. It's a telegraft, no more nor less. It's sint be a quick boat, quicker nor what you thravel in. Larry goes to New York an' ses to the captin, he ses, "Here's a missage for me ould mother," he ses, "an' I want it sint be the telegraft ship," he ses. "I know it costs more 'n a letther, but, shure, I'm a rich man now," he ses, "an' it's more 'n that I'd give," he ses, "to sind a missage to me poor ould mother."'

Old Biddy sighed, the tears running from her sightless eyes.

'Rade the missage,' said she.

Paddy, clearing his throat, went through the pantomime of crumpling the paper, turning it upside down before he began:

'"Dear Mother an' Father—I take me pen in han' to write you these few lines, hopin' you're in good health, as this laves me at prisint," he says; thank God for it! "This is a short missage," he ses, "for it costs a shillin' a wurrud," he ses, "an' it's to let you know that I'll be home afore Christmiss if the tide sarves," he ses. "An' tell me ould mother," he ses——'

The old woman stretched out her hands.

'Ay, what? What?' she exclaimed.

Paddy glanced angrily at her.

'"Tell me ould mother not to be makin' a gaum iv herself," he ses.'

'What!' she cried, 'did Larry say that?'

'No, shure,' replied Paddy, relenting. 'Shure, it's the wrong wurruds I'm radin'. Let me see, now. Ay, here it is. "Tell me ould mother," he ses, "God bless her——"'

She struck her withered palms together, then bent forward more eagerly.

'"God bless her,"' continued Paddy, who was growing sleepy, '"I'd write more, only I've to take tay," he ses, "wid the Presidint iv the United States," he ses, "a dacent man, who's takin' a quare likin' to me," he ses, "an' gives me an odd job in the gardin now an' agin," he ses. "So wid best love,"' concluded Paddy, yawning, '"to me mother an' father, but specially to me ould mother, I am,

yir affectionate an' lovin' son, Larry." There now, are you satisfied?'

She lay back on the sacks, closing her eyes in rapture. Paddy, returning the useful bit of newspaper to his bosom, stretched himself again for slumber.

Presently the old woman sat up.

'Rade it agin!' said she.

He slightly raised his head.

'The divil a rade I'll rade till the mornin'; I'm worn out.'

'Hard ould man!' said she. But she made no further demand and they were both soon asleep.

Towards early morning, when the wind subsided, there came a loud hammering at the door. Old Paddy awoke. He raised himself on his elbow to listen.

The hammering continued with increased vehemence; the door threatened to give way.

'Open the dure!' cried a hoarse voice without.

Old Paddy instantly thought that Larry had come home.

'Hould on a minit!' he cried, rising eagerly.

He glanced at his wife. She was fast asleep. When, with trembling hands, he had rolled the stone from the door, he stood confronted by three masked men with firearms in their hands.

Old Paddy shrank back. The leader, stretching forth a strong hand, caught him by the shoulder, and, dragging him out, flung him on the ground. The old man, rising to his knees, gaped in speechless terror at the three men. He put his hands together. The leader, having glanced at the lock of his gun, raised it to his shoulder.

'Och, what——' began old Paddy.

'Ye worked for the Kennedys!' exclaimed the leader. At the same moment he fired the contents of the gun into the old man's bosom. Paddy fell back. The three assassins, after a hasty glance at their victim, fled down the mountain, crouching as they ran.

Old Biddy came out from the hovel, groping her way.

'Who's there?' she cried.

There was no reply.

'I heard firin'. Where's the ould man? What have ye done to him?'

A groan burst from old Paddy's bloodstained lips. Creeping over, she knelt down, her hands wandering about his body. Presently she lifted up her face, and shrieked:

'What's this, Paddy? What's this?'

With a convulsive effort, old Paddy raised himself on his elbow. His face worked violently. Then he cried:

'Larry's come home at last! Take down the flag!'

His jaw dropped. He fell back. Never again would his anxious hands plant the flag of distress to confront the States.

XX.

MAN'S INGRATITUDE.

MISS HANNAH, having established herself as housekeeper to Father Pat, soon found that the housework exceeded her physical power. With his permission, she hired a strong country girl as maid-of-all-work. This gave her more leisure, which she spent cultivating the society of Father Pat and Mr. O'Ryan. As she also took her meals with them, she was beginning to consider herself indispensable to their happiness, when she incidentally learned of Mr. O'Ryan's projected marriage with her niece. This was a terrible shock to her. For a few days, however, she concealed her feelings, devoting herself to confirming her suspicions by manipulating the conversation. The result confirmed her worst apprehensions. She resolved, therefore, to have an understanding with his reverence. Seizing an occasion when dinner was being prepared, and Mr. O'Ryan temporarily absent, she resolved to settle matters beyond the shadow of a

doubt. Accordingly, she put on her best black mittens, concealed her more obtrusive gray hairs under her cap, and sought his reverence, whom she found meditating in an arm-chair with a snuff-box in his hand.

'Well, your reverence,' said she, as she entered.

'Och, is that you?' returned Father Pat, with a grimace at the fireplace. 'What's the matther now? There's not much pace or comfort in this house since that ould woman lift. Bedad, I nivir thought there was so much in the place wantin' to be settled in a diffirint way, until you came.'

Miss Hannah sat down near him, so placed that she could watch his face. She stroked the backs of her mittened hands in her lap.

'The place was certainly not in a fit state for your reverence.'

'So you say,' he remarked.

'I've done my best. Pray do not stand on ceremony with me. If you wish me to go I can go.'

His reverence crossed his legs uneasily.

'Oh, I'm not sayin' anything,' said he. 'I'm obliged t' you.'

He took a pinch of snuff. Then, stretching his compressed lips, he glared into the fireplace in anticipation of a sneeze which might occur at any moment. Miss Hannah smoothed one hand over

the other, looking with dim eyes over Father Pat's head at the muslin blinds on the window.

'Is it true, sir?' she began, but faltered.

Father Pat sneezed. As he carried his large red handkerchief towards his nose, he looked askance at her.

'Is what thrue?' he asked.

She started with a little shiver. Holding his handkerchief to his face, he gave her another shrewd, sidelong glance. She looked down.

'Is it true, your reverence, that Mr. O'Ryan is engaged to my niece?'

'What iv it is?' returned Father Pat gruffly 'Isn't he good enough for her?'

'Oh yes, yes,' she replied hurriedly. 'Oh dear, yes! Any woman might be proud—hem!'

Father Pat stood up. Laboriously stuffing the handkerchief into the pocket in his coat-tails, he stared hard at her, his under-lip working.

'It appears t' me,' said he, 'that you take a mighty great inthrest in Misther O'Ryan?'

'Oh, your reverence, I——'

'It appears t' me,' continued Father Pat, speaking emphatically, 'that you take more inthrest in him than a woman iv yir age should take in a young man.'

'Your reverence!'

She rose indignantly. He pointed to her chair.

'Sit down,' said he, in a louder voice. 'Sit down there. I'm talkin' to you now as yir priest.'

'As my priest?' murmured Miss Hannah. She turned pale, weakly resuming her seat.

'As yir priest, I have some wurruds to say t' you.' Watching her with the same sidelong glance, he spread out his feet well apart, tucking his hands under his coat-tails. 'I had intindid spakin' iv this matther before, but betther late than nivir. You've come to this house to throw yir cap at Ignatius O'Ryan——'

'Father, you mistake.'

She rose again indignantly. Again he pointed to the chair, ordering her to sit down.

'I'm spakin' t' you as yir priest,' he repeated.

She hung her head, staring at the mittened fingers now tightly interlaced on her lap.

'Yir an ould woman,' said Father Pat, 'to be disavin' yirsilf wid drames iv love. Yir a gray-headed ould woman, an' you ought to be ashamed iv yirsilf.'

She searched hurriedly for her handkerchief to put to her eyes.

'You've insarted yirsilf in this house,' continued his reverence sternly, 'undher pritince iv housekeepin' for yir priest, but you can't disave me. If Ignatius O'Ryan wasn't here, the sorra foot you'd ivir have set in the premises.'

'That,' sobbed Miss Hannah, 'is not the case.'

An indignant scarlet suffused Father Pat's face. His eyes glinted.

'How dar you conthradict yir priest!' he exclaimed. 'D'you want to set yirsilf up agin the authority iv yir Church?'

'Oh no, no!'

'Thin, hould yir tongue while I spake! I've the charge iv yir sowl, an' it's yir place to listen an' make no remarks. I've watched you ivir sinse you came here, an' I see how matthers stand. Arra, woman,' he burst forth, enraged, 'do you think a man wid the unparalleled gifts iv Ignatius O'Ryan is goin' to thrubble his head about a gray-haired ould feymale like you? What are you dhramin' about? What kind iv fancies got into yir brain when y' ought to be thinkin' about yir sowl? I'll have no more iv this, I tell you. I'm spakin' as yir priest, and I say—mark me wurruds—yir puttin' yir sowl in danger. You may dhrive me to savare misures if you don't take care!'

There was silence. Father Pat, breathing hard, sat down heavily in his chair. He took an angry pinch of snuff. After a few minutes Miss Hannah rose. With downcast eyes, she said, in a broken voice:

'I—I think I'll take the veil. The world has no interest for me, sir.'

'Well, well,' said he, 'you might do worse things than jine a nunnery. If yir minded that way, I've nothing to say agin it.'

She listened respectfully. When he had spoken, she glided noiselessly from the room.

Mr. O'Ryan entered fresh from an oratorical triumph in the League rooms, where he had been advocating his ability to fill the Parliamentary vacancy which had recently occurred in the borough. As he wiped his boots on the mat at the foot of the stairs, Miss Hannah descended.

'Ha, madam,' said he, 'always intint on household matthers! Is his rivirence above?'

'Yes,' she replied.

As he prepared to mount the stairs he paused with his hand on the banister.

'I hope, madam, you're not ill? You don't look quite yirsilf.'

'I have been speaking to his reverence,' returned Miss Hannah, in a subdued voice. She had her eyes cast down, but suddenly lifted them to scan his face, as she added, 'I am going into a nunnery, Mr. O'Ryan.'

Releasing the banister, he faced her.

'Indade?' said he. 'This is a sudden risolooshin?'

'Not altogether. I have always been more or

less inclined to leave the world. There is a great deal of ingratitude in it, Mr. O'Ryan.'

He gravely shook his head.

'Thrue, thrue,' said he. 'It's a poor wurruld at the bist.'

'There is a great deal of deceit in it,' said Miss Hannah, with a level look at him.

'There is indade. An', shure, I often think it's well for thim that have rinounced it. But, if I'm not mistaken, ma'm, you wir always iv a divout disposishin?'

'Oh yes, I believe so,' she replied in a pettish tone. 'I hope your courtship of my niece is progressing to your satisfaction?'

'Well, well,' said Mr. O'Ryan, laughing, 'so those stories are goin' about? The wurruld will talk, ma'm, specially iv its prominint carracters. Have you tould his rivirence iv your detarmination?'

'Yes,' she answered shortly.

'Well, it does you credit, ma'm!' he exclaimed. 'It's a holy an' saycrid risilooshin, an' may you prove an acciptible bride iv hevin! I'm shure you disarve it.'

'Thank you!' said Miss Hannah coldly. She proceeded to the kitchen.

Mr. O'Ryan mounted the stairs in several quick springs. He burst into the room.

'Hush!' whispered Father Pat, who was waiting for him at the door. Holding up a forefinger, his reverence added softly: 'I've got rid iv her at last!'

Mr. O'Ryan said nothing, but he grasped his reverence by the hand, looking into his eyes with a gratitude more eloquent than speech.

After dinner, which Miss Hannah did not attend, the two gentlemen, putting on their overcoats, set out for the League rooms.

'There's a power iv work to be done,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, as they proceeded along the road. 'I've bin soundin' the committee to-day relative to the vacant sate, an' I don't think we'll have much thrubble.'

'Yir bound to be returned,' said Father Pat. 'I'll give it out in chapel next Sunday, an' I'd like to see the man ud dispute me authority.'

'Thrue for you,' rejoined Mr. O'Ryan. 'For if you can look so well afther their spiritule consarns, it's only logical to asoom that you can manage timporal consarns wid aiqual success.'

They walked on for a few moments in silence. Mr. O'Ryan fell into thought. Presently he looked up.

'As we'll be late to-night, yir rivirence,' said he, 'at the Lague rooms, I'm thinkin' we might come home round be Kennedy's farm. I'd like to see the look iv the place undher the boycott.'

'Ay, an' a look at Miss Nora's back windas?' said Father Pat slyly.

'Well, well, sor, you wir always fond iv yir little joke,' said Mr. O'Ryan, smiling.

But Mr. O'Ryan, as he turned his face modestly away from Father Pat's shrewd eyes, suddenly turned pale. He saw a curious procession descending from the Cusha mountain to the highroad. Four members of the constabulary were carrying a stretcher; two other men with a sergeant walked behind. They were followed by a small crowd of awe-stricken country people.

'Saints in glory!' exclaimed Father Pat, 'what have we here? What foul play is this?'

He turned to Mr. O'Ryan, whose white lips silently moved.

The procession, having reached the road, halted a few paces ahead. The two constables behind relieved those carrying the stretcher. As Father Pat hurried up, the people respectfully made way.

'Well, sarjint,' said his reverence, 'what have we here?'

The sergeant, an elderly man with white closely-cropped hair, replied:

'A murdher, sor.'

'A—what?' said Father Pat, aghast.

The sergeant made a step towards the stretcher. Turning down a portion of the rough covering, he

revealed the stark face of old Paddy with dropped jaw, the whites of the eyes showing between the half-gummed lids.

'Saints in glory!' exclaimed Father Pat, lifting his hands, while several of the crowd pressed forward to look over his shoulder. 'Is it possible?'

The sergeant, covering the face, ordered his men to proceed. Father Pat walked beside him to the police-station. When the corpse was brought in, the people stood about the door, but were forced to further distance by several constables.

Father Pat proceeded down the street in deep meditation. He was not conscious that he had been walking alone for several minutes, until he heard Mr. O'Ryan hurrying up behind him.

'This is a terrible bizness, Ignatius,' said his reverence gloomily.

Mr. O'Ryan, whose face was still white, seemed to have become thinner. He shrugged his shoulders, making no reply. Presently he threw back his head.

'A man, now, sor,' he exclaimed, 'like Napolyan Bonaparte—ah! There was a man, sor, that waded to power through blood. He was a great man, sor, a man iv iron will.'

'Shure, what's that to do wid it?' asked Father Pat. 'Napolyan didn't murdher ould Paddy.'

'A man, sor, iv iron will,' repeated Mr. O'Ryan restlessly.

They walked on, pausing in front of the White Horse Hotel, where the Ballycusha League had its headquarters.

'There'll be someone hanged for this murdher,' remarked Father Pat, mounting the steps.

'I tell you, sor,' exclaimed Mr. O'Ryan, following, 'that sarjint is an insilent hireling. His very look, sor, is an insult. Whin I'm in power, as I may be some day, I'll put that man in his proper place!'

They entered the hall, proceeding upstairs to the committee-room.

XXI.

AN ACT OF INSANITY.

NEXT morning Nora was assisting Martha in the kitchen. Neither Val, nor the Castle men, had arrived to help at the farm. Nora felt apprehensive. She heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs in the yard. She saw Val ride in on Sunflower. He quickly pulled up the mare before the stable, at the same time shouting for Mr. Kennedy. The farmer came to the stable door in his shirt-sleeves, wiping his brows against his arm. Jumping down, Val stood with the reins in his hands, talking earnestly to him. Both Nora and Martha stared out at the two men. Then Nora, seeing Val preparing to mount, ran out to intercept him.

'Are you off?' she exclaimed reproachfully.

He had just said good-bye to Mr. Kennedy, but turned in the saddle at the sound of Nora's voice.

'Oh, Nora,' said he, 'you'll have to make allowance for my rudeness. We're boycotted at the Castle.'

'Boycotted?' repeated Nora.

She looked at him, then at her father, who, from the stable door, shook his head, echoing, 'Boycotted.'

'Oh, poor Val, I'm so sorry!' said Nora. She caressed Sunflower's neck as she looked up at her lover. 'How scandalous! What will you do?'

'Oh, we'll manage to get along,' returned Val with a laugh. 'The governor and I will sow the potatoes, and mother and the girls can milk the cows. It will be a variation on Beethoven's sonatas, you know.'

'It is too bad,' said Nora, biting her lip.

'Yes,' he responded, bending down to speak in a low voice. 'The worst of it is, I won't see a certain person as often as I should like.'

'Oh, Val!'

She turned her face aside.

'That's just it,' said he. 'But I'll come round to-morrow, at all hazards.'

'Oh do, Val, do!'

He laughed at her eagerness.

'Yes,' said he; 'I must follow my heart.'

She suddenly caressed Sunflower's neck again, whispering, 'Dear old Sunflower!' Then, as she kissed the mare's nose, she said to Val, 'Take care of Sunflower.'

He shook out the reins.

'And of myself?' said he archly.

Nora tossed her head as she stepped aside.

'Oh, you are only a secondary consideration,' said she.

'Cruel Nora!' laughed Val, and he rode away.

She waved her hand to him, saying:

'Good-bye, Val.'

As he went through the gate he turned round in the saddle to kiss his hand to her, exclaiming:

'Good-bye, Nora.'

'Boycotted?' said Mr. Kennedy, preparing to resume work. 'The lord iv the soil boycotted? Where's this all goin' to end? Glory be to God!'

Nora, having smilingly watched Val out of sight, advanced with anxious brows to the stable door as her father turned in.

'This is dreadful, father! Things are getting worse. How will we manage now?'

'Little woman,' said her father, turning back, 'we must only thrust in God. I was thinkin——'

He looked at her reflectively, then at the ground. He seemed troubled.

'What were you thinking, father?'

He drew his arm across his brows.

'I was thinkin',' said he slowly, 'mebbe it would be betther for you, little woman, to go away until this throuble is over. You see——'

'Father!' cried Nora.

Her voice was so sharply indignant that he stared helplessly at her.

'Never,' exclaimed Nora, stamping her foot, 'never dare to suggest such a thing again. I'm not Aunt Hannah!'

She walked across to the kitchen with her head more erect than usual. Her father, resting his hand on the door-post, looked after her.

'No,' said he to himself, 'you're not Aunt Hannah. But you're not made iv steel, nor,' he added, with a reminiscence of schoolboy recitation, 'nor yet "as sthrong as iron bands."'

He resumed his work in the stables. He had not been long engaged when he was visited by the District Inspector, accompanied by two constables. Mr. Kennedy then learned for the first time of the assassination of old Paddy. The police came, in the usual course, for information concerning the movements of Paddy the day preceding the murder.

When they left, Mr. Kennedy sat down beside the kitchen table, staring at the flagged floor. Martha, in speechless horror, had collapsed into a chair before the fire. Near her stood Nora, gazing at her father. There was an oppressive silence, during which the tick of the hall clock sounded throughout the house. Mr. Kennedy was bent. He seemed to study the floor as if it were a problem

in mathematics. Presently, he sat up, letting his arm fall in a lifeless way on the table. Drawing in his breath, he rose to resume his work.

'Father,' said Nora in a broken voice, as he was leaving the kitchen.

He turned to look at her sorrowfully.

'Don't spake t' me, little woman,' said he; 'I'm not able to talk. I'll go out.'

He went away.

'Oh, this is terrible!' exclaimed Nora, wringing her hands. She gazed at the fire. Shaking her head, she said softly, 'Poor old Paddy!'

'As good an ould cratur as ivir lived!' moaned Martha, wiping her eyes with her apron. 'God rest his sowl! An' may the curse iv murdher lie heavy on thim that tuk his life! An' he sat there only yesterda, kitten,' she continued, nodding mournfully towards the end of the table, 'just there where the masther was sittin' this minit. The poor ould man! An' he tellin' me about his son Larry, in America, an' his ould woman, a poor dark cratur. Shure, he had a quare way iv talkin' always, but he was a dacent, humble, poor ould man. Och, what harrum did the poor ould cratur do that they should kill him? Shure, it wasn't in him to hurt a fly!'.

'He worked for us, Martha,' said Nora; 'that was his crime.'

Martha, like her mistress, gazed reflectively into the fire, then started.

'Miss Nora!' she whispered.

'Yes, Martha,' said Nora, without turning, 'what is it?'

'Pigeon, as shure as I'm sittin' here——'

'Yes, Martha?'

Martha had paused.

'That black villin O'Ryan's at the bottom iv this!'

Nora shuddered. The same thought had been in her mind. But she refrained from encouraging the suspicion in her old nurse. The day passed gloomily. Dinner was prepared as usual, but Nora ate nothing; even Mr. Kennedy, whose appetite was proportionate to his strength, ate little. Throughout the evening Martha was full of reminiscences of old Paddy. She related them to Nora whenever she had an opportunity, but Nora did not even make a pretence of listening. In the evening the police paid another visit to the farm, Mr. Kennedy seeing them alone.

Next day Nora rose early to make her father's breakfast before he began work. She laid the table in the sitting-room. Breakfast was ready when she heard him moving about upstairs. She gave a glance of satisfaction at the well-arranged table, with its aroma of rashers and eggs stealing

from under the covers. As she stood with her back to the window, a shadow fell across the room. At the same moment someone tapped from without on the panes. She turned with a nervous start, but gave a cry of delight when she saw Val Blake looking in. She did not observe how horror-stricken he was until she had let him in at the front-door. In the room she clung to his arm, crying anxiously:

'Val, what is the matter?'

He said, 'Oh, Nora!' before sitting down helplessly.

She stood beside him, stroking his hair.

'Yes, dear,' said she gently, 'it was horrible to murder the poor old man.'

Val looked quickly up at her with tears in his eyes.

'Yes, I know,' said he. 'I know, I have heard; but Nora——'

She trembled. There was a new terror in her voice as she whispered:

'What is it?'

He put his hands over his face, while his whole frame shook with emotion.

'Sunflower, Nora, Sunflower!'

Nora felt suddenly ill; her face blanched. She recoiled from him, holding on to the table.

'What—what?' was all she could utter.

Val, jumping up fiercely, strode about the room.

'Nora,' said he, 'they cut out Sunflower's tongue last night. The dastards! I shot her this morning; I couldn't see her in pain. Oh, my God, my poor old Sunflower!'

Nora sat down, pressing her hands tightly between her knees. Her eyes were hot. She did not look at Val, but, gazing straight before her, said:

'Can people do this and call themselves men?'

The next instant she saw her father standing motionless in the doorway. As their eyes met, he entered.

'Ay, I've heard,' said he. 'I just heard what Master Val said as I came down the hall. So, they've murdhered a poor harmless ould man an' the best mare in the county. Don't let it crush you, Masther Val. Be a man!'

Val had his face turned away. He was crying. Mr. Kennedy laid his hand on his shoulder. They stood thus for a moment, their emotions working in silence. Mr. Kennedy turned to his daughter.

'Nora,' said he, in low stern tones, 'I'll make thim pay for their work. No. Well, I don't mane that. It doesn't matther. Let's breakfast. Masther Val, sit down an' take a mouthful.'

Nora had listened attentively to her father, noticing how he had checked himself. She noticed more than that, for in his eyes she had seen a

strange expression which, accustomed as she had been for years to minutely scrutinize his face, thrilled her with a new sensation of vague misfortune. That wild look in her father's eyes seemed to transform him, though for a moment, into a man whom she did not know. But she started up to attend the breakfast-table. Val, however, would not stay. He was on his way to the police-barracks to report the outrage; he left them abruptly. Nora breakfasted with her father in silence, but when he rose to depart, she said quietly:

'Father, what did you mean when you said you'd make them pay for this?'

He paused in the doorway to consider. Then he waved his hand.

'It doesn't matther, little woman. Perhaps I meant nothin'. Me mind's quare. I dare say I meant nothin'. I must go now. They killed the best mare in the county. Poor Masther Val's hit hard. Well, glory be to God!'

He went out. Nora sat with her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands, staring reflectively at nothing until Martha arrived to clear away.

Val did not return. The day gloomily passed in the same routine of hard work. At night, about ten o'clock, Mr. Kennedy, declining supper, requested Nora and Martha to go to bed, and retired

himself upstairs. Nora sent Martha to bed, but instead of going directly herself, lay down on a settle-bed in a deep nook beside the fire.

The lights were out. The kitchen-fire, made of turf, occasionally shot up a little spark, which sent the shadows dancing across the rafters. Nora lay on her back, with her hands under her head, watching the play of light and shadow above, until by degrees she fell into a light sleep. She had slept about an hour, when she was awakened by the sound of careful footsteps. Turning her head, she saw a man noiselessly taking down a lantern from the cupboard. He was a large man wrapped in a great-coat, his shadow being projected in gigantic proportions along the rafters. Nora was too terrified to scream; she lay still to watch. When the man had taken down the lantern—a common stable lantern—he glanced uneasily about the kitchen before coming stealthily to the fire. She then saw that the man was her father. She was about to speak to him, but her first reflections were that she might startle him; the next, that his movements were so mysterious that they implied some secret design. He knelt down before the fire to light the lantern. She, still intently watching him, saw an expression on his face which she had never seen there before—a sequel to that of the same morning. He lit the

lantern, then rose, softly leaving the kitchen after another glance round. Nora sat up, rubbing her eyes. Was her father in a somnambulistic trance, she wondered, or was his appearance merely a dream? At this reflection, she hastened to the window. The night was dark. She could see across the yard the bobbing glimmer of the lantern. It was no dream. Her father must be in a trance, she thought, and it was her duty to follow him. Perhaps the assassins who murdered old Paddy might be lurking round the farm. Clutching at a shawl —which happened to be Martha's—hanging on the wall, she wrapped it about her head and shoulders. She sped across the yard. By degrees, becoming accustomed to the darkness, she made her way without difficulty to the walk leading to the haggard. She saw the lantern flitting in the distance. Hastening after, she entered the haggard. She could now distinguish the figure of her father. He had stopped near the hay-sheds to look about. Somnambulists, she knew, did not look about to see if they were followed. She crouched behind an upturned farm-cart to watch.

There were two great stores of hay on opposite sides of the yard, under galvanized iron roofing. Before one of them stood her father. Presently she saw him stoop to strike a light. Then he set fire to the hay. In another instant the flames burst

forth. Apparently astounded at his own deed, her father stood before the flames staring at them, until, with a sudden start, he turned to fly. But at the same moment there was a loud shout, and two men, clambering over the low wall at the end of the yard, rushed after him. They caught him by the shoulders. The hay was a mass of flame, lighting up, not only the yard, but all the offices, the trees and the land around the farm. There, within a few paces of the terrified Nora, stood her father in the grasp of two men. She recognised them at once. They were Father Pat and Mr. O'Ryan. Mr. Kennedy dropped his lantern. He stared from one to the other. Father Pat was the first to speak.

'Bedad, Misther Kennedy,' said he, 'this is a bad night's work.'

'It's well we were kept late at the meetin',' said Mr. O'Ryan exultingly, 'an' came round just to see how things were gettin' on here. We nivir ixpicted to find Misther Kennedy settin' his own hay on fire. Here's a crime agin the insurance company, an' there'd have bin a heavy claim agin the cess-payers of the barony, too, I presoom——'

'Stop!' cried Father Pat suddenly. 'A light breaks in on me. Misther Kennedy, yir hay wint on fire two years ago?'

Nora's father made no reply. He was like a man bereft of all thoughts save one—that he had

been detected in a felony by his enemies. He turned his pallid face to Father Pat, his lips silently moving.

'Ay, ay,' said Father Pat, winking at Mr. O'Ryan. 'The barony paid two hundred pounds to this man bekase he made a claim for wilful damage. Misther Kennedy, I know you now. Ignatius, go for the polis.'

Nora's father fell on his knees, clutching the priest's coat-tails.

'Not that, yir rivirence!' he cried. 'Not that disgrace upon me child!'

'Why didn't you think iv yir child before?' exclaimed Father Pat sternly. 'You're the man that set himself up agin me authority, are you? You wudn't jine the Lague? Ignatius, go for the polis.'

Mr. Kennedy dragged at Father Pat's coat.

'I'll join the Lague,' he groaned. 'Anything, anything, but me child's disgrace!'

'Don't look for marcy from me,' exclaimed Father Pat. 'You set yirself up agin me authority. An' as shure as that hay is blazin' there——'

'A wurrud, yir rivirence,' said Mr. O'Ryan. He drew the priest aside. They whispered.

Gazing at the kneeling figure of her father, Nora felt as if the earth was reeling. When the two men had consulted, they approached Mr. Kennedy,

addressing him in low tones. Nora could not hear what was said; but she heard her father groan, and knew from his manner that he acquiesced in their demands. The three men went towards the farm, her father walking with bent head. Nora crouched under the cart until they had passed.

Soon after the police and a crowd of people arrived. Father Pat screened Mr. Kennedy from suspicion. In the early morning, when the fire was almost burned out, the people, police, Father Pat and Mr. O'Ryan departed. Mr. Kennedy sat alone, pale and motionless, before the kitchen fire. Upstairs, Nora lay stretched on her bed with her face in her hands, sobbing as she had never sobbed before.

XXII.

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.

FATHER PAT, with Mr. Ryan, proceeded homewards in good humour. An hour later they were seated at the table before a large decanter of whisky. Father Pat rubbed his hands.

'I'll place no limit to-day,' said he, 'on the whisky. Fill up the glasses, Ignatius, me bould boy.'

'Was it me inspiration,' asked Mr. O'Ryan excitedly, as he filled the tumblers, 'to come round be Kennedy's farm to-night? Was it, sor?'

'It was, Ignatius, it was.'

'Ha, ha! Sor, I dhrink t' you!'

They clinked glasses. Father Pat, smacking his lips, drew his chair nearer the fireplace to stir the fire with a poker.

'I see more in this than chance,' observed Mr. O'Ryan solemnly. 'I see, sor, the fingir iv Providince.'

Father Pat looked round as he stooped over the fire.

'Bedad, an' I'm not surprised,' said he, 'for Kennedy hasn't given a shillin' to me these two years. A close-fisted man, but we've got him now, thank God!'

'We've got him now, sor, an' his daughter.'

Father Pat, sitting up, stretched back his hand for the glass.

'Ay, I dare say that matther 'll be aisily squared now,' said he. 'He won't hould his head so high. How dar he cross me, the priest iv the parish! Shure, there 'd be no Providence at all, at all, if the authority iv the priest was to be thrampled on.'

'Providince, sor,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, refilling his glass, 'is not goin' to let Father Murphy be insulted be one iv his own congrigation. No, sor! Providince, sor, knows what he's about, or I'm very much mistaken. Have I put too much wather in it, sor?'

His reverence, having drunk a mouthful, smacked his lips.

'No, no,' he replied; 'it's all right, Ignatius. Help yirsilf, me boy. Ah——'

'What's the matther, sor?' inquired Mr. O'Ryan respectfully, as his reverence paused, gravely shaking his head.

'Nothin', nothin', me boy,' returned Father Pat,

hastily drinking to hide his emotion, which had forced tears into his eyes. 'It can't be helped. There's some things we dar not spake iv, Ignatius!'

'Sor?' replied Ignatius with his head aside.

'I've bin good to you?' asked his reverence huskily.

O'Ryan, kneeling, put the priest's hand to his lips.

'Get up, boy,' said his reverence more huskily. 'It's all right. I've bin good to you, an' I'll do what I can for you. I can't rimidy the past, me son; but wid God's help I'll do what I can.'

'I have nivir hinted iv this to you, Father,' said Ignatius with bowed head.

'Betther not! betther not!' said Father Pat. 'We can only make the best iv it. An' we'll dhrink, boy, in silence to her. She lies cowld to-night, poor cratur, poor cratur!'

His reverence broke down weeping. O'Ryan wiped his eyes. After a few moments of silent emotion, Father Pat handed his empty glass.

'Fill that up, Ignatius, an' we'll dhrink in silence to the dead.'

The glasses were filled. Both men stood without a word. Then Father Pat, raising his glass, said solemnly:

'Ignatius, we dhrink to yir mother.'

'To me mother,' responded Ignatius softly.

They resumed their seats. Father Pat stirred up the fire. O'Ryan sat opposite, a small table with the decanter and water-jug being between them. As they drank deeper the conversation brightened.

'There'll be a new mimbir soon,' said Father Pat, striking his hand on his knee, 'a new mimbir iv parlimint for Ballycusha, an' his name 'll be Ignatius O'Ryan.'

'Wid the help iv God an' yirsilf, sor.'

'Ay, an' yir own. You've janius, boy—born janius. Yir an orathor, Ignatius, any counthry ud be proud iv, an' I say it to yir face.'

'Well, sor, I have gifts. I won't deny it. It ud be affectashin in me to deny it, sor.'

'Troth, you nadent thry, boy, for it's in ivry wurrud you spake, God bless you! An', bedad, the wurruld 'll hear iv you yet.'

'There's a power iv work to be done for Ireland, sor. As a statesman, sor, I see a power iv work to be done. But we can't do anything, sor, till we have Home Rule.'

'Ay, thrue for you—no funds.'

'No funds, sor. But whin we have a Parlimint, sor, on the ould sod, it's thinkin' I am, if I tuk office——'

'As what?'

'Well sor, I'm not partiklar. But I same to

have a laynin' towards the Exchequer. Now, sor, as Chancillir iv the Exchequer I'd be in a position iv great power. I cud dispinse offices, sor, an' feed the lingerin' industries iv the ould country. Nor wud I be onmindful iv the claims iv the Church. There's a parish priest, sor, ud be a bishop before long, or I'd know the raisin why.'

'Troth, there's many bishops where they oughtn't to be, though it's meself that ses it. But I'm well contint as priest iv the parish.'

'Well, sor, whin I'm in power I know where to look whin I want a bishop.'

'Ay, the future's bright,' said Father Pat meditatively. 'But that murdher iv ould Paddy's an ugly bizniss.'

'That reminds me, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'I'll want yir signiture, as Chairman iv the Lague, to a cheque for fifty pounds to-morra.'

'Fifty pounds? An' why so?' asked Father Pat, surprised.

'Well, sor, I want to sind Tim Cassidy out iv the counthry, to America. I've me suspicions, an' I must get rid iv him. He's too ready to take a hint.'

Father Pat, pursing his lips, put his hand to his chin. Mr. O'Ryan, tilting back his chair, folded his arms as he stared at the ceiling. When his reverence had cogitated for awhile he sighed.

'Well,' said he, 'I suppose it must be done. But how will it look in the accounts?'

Mr. O'Ryan still stared at the ceiling.

'It can go undher the head iv incidintal expinsis,' he answered. 'I can aisily explain to the Committee. They won't go agin me, you may dipind.'

They became rather silent after this. Father Pat, becoming drowsy, gradually fell asleep. Mr. O'Ryan sat mentally composing his maiden speech for the House of Commons. Daylight began to mingle with the lamplight. Father Pat snored in his deep armchair, his arms hanging down, his legs stretched out, his head lying back with upturned face.

Mr. O'Ryan, seated at the table, had loosened his collar, unbuttoned his vest, and was mixing a last tumbler of whisky-and-water before retiring upstairs to bed, when there was a sharp tap of knuckles at the door. Mr. O'Ryan turned his head to listen. Another tap. He rose; opening the door, he saw Miss Hannah in bonnet and black shawl, with a bag.

'I've come to say good-bye to his reverence,' she said coldly.

'He's asleep,' whispered Mr. O'Ryan. 'Shall I wake him?'

'By no means,' she replied. 'Good-bye, Mr. O'Ryan.'

He tenderly held her hand.

'Madam,' said he, 'I honour you. I feel onworthy to brathe the same atmisphere. I'm only a poor, onworthy sinner, an' you a consicrated bride iv hivin. As such, accipt me deepest rivirence.'

He stooped to kiss her hand, but she pulled it away, saying sharply:

'Be good enough, sir, to bid his reverence goodbye for me.'

Before he could respond she had gone downstairs. He closed the door; then, hurrying to the window, he waited smilingly there until he saw her tall black figure, in the dim morning light, pass down the garden out on to the road.

XXIII.

MR. KENNEDY, PATRIOT.

FOR three days Nora remained in bed. Her father came to her room on the second day, but she pretended to be asleep. Through her eyelashes she saw him gaze remorsefully at her. He sighed deeply as he went away. The boycott was raised. All the servants returned to the farm, including Delia, whom Nora at once dismissed. On the morning of the fourth day after the burning of the rick, old Martha entered Nora's bedroom with a large bowl of beef-tea.

'Will you sit up an' take this, darlin'?' said Martha, standing at the bedside.

Nora opened her eyes. She sat up, taking the bowl on her lap.

'What time is it?' she asked.

'Ten o'clock, duckie,' replied Martha, shaking up the pillows. 'Shure, you had a fine sleep, thank God. An' now dhrink that wee bowl iv beef-tay. It'll do you all the good in the wurruld.

Lord love you, you haven't et anything these three days.'

'It's very nice, Martha.'

'To be shure it is,' responded Martha cheerfully. 'Let me put this shawl about yir shoulders. There now! Bless her, she is a pictur! Only you're a weeshy bit pale.'

'I am better to-day, nursie.'

'Musha, that's right! Shure, the masther was throubled about you; an' I tould him it was only a wakeness.'

Martha sat on the foot of the bed.

'Where's father?' asked Nora, looking up from her bowl.

'Well, thin, he's gone to the town-hall.'

'Why, what is there?'

'Shure, thin,' replied Martha mysteriously, 'I'm tould that O'Ryan is to be proposed mimbir iv Parlimint, an' yir father's gone to help him. For between oursilves, pigeon, as I tould you yesterda, the masther—God help him!—has gone round altogither. Shure, duckie, perhaps it's the bist thing. They forced him into it. Anyhow, I hope they'll put that O'Ryan into Parlimint, for thin we'll be rid iv him, thank God!'

'Martha, take this bowl. I must go to the town-hall.'

'To the town-hall, chicken?'

'Yes; I want to see what father is doing. Don't worry me, Martha. Take the bowl. It's very nice, but I've had enough. Now I'll get up.'

Martha ruefully took the bowl.

'But, duckie,' said she, 'won't you take a little more? Do, like a darlin' child! It's rale sthrong, an' 'll do you a power iv good.'

Nora prepared to rise.

'No, Martha; I must go and see what father's doing, and you will come with me. Go and get your bonnet and shawl.'

'Well, well, I suppose I must.'

They went to the town-hall. The door was surrounded with a crowd of surplus Ballycusha idlers. Nora, closely veiled, got a retired seat in the gallery, Martha sitting beside her.

The hall was crowded. Father Pat, as chairman, was addressing the meeting. On his right sat Mr. O'Ryan, the chosen candidate, with folded arms; on his left Mr. Kennedy, bending forward, his arm on his knee as he gazed at the floor. Behind Father Pat sat the town commissioners, several priests, and the prominent members of the League.

Father Pat seemed to be in good humour. He smiled at the crowd, waving his hand, in which he held a bundle of papers.

'An' now, me frinds,' said he, as Nora entered,

'I won't detain yiz any longer. I've bin spakin' too long already.' (Several persons shouted, 'Go on, yir rivirence!') 'No, no, I've bin spakin' a lot, an' me throat's dhry,' continued Father Pat. 'I'm glad yiz rispondid to the call. It's only what I ixpicted from me expariance iv yiz. It'll be a bad day for the counthry whin the priest an' people cease to be united——'

'Hear, hear!' said Mr. O'Ryan significantly.

'An' whin the people,' said Father Pat, 'forgit to look to the priests as their anointed layders.'

'Hear, hear!' said Mr. O'Ryan, and the people cheered.

'An' now,' concluded Father Pat, 'I'll make way for me frind, Misther Kennedy, who's about to propose, as yir mimbir, the gifted pathriot, Ignatius O'Ryan.'

The name was greeted with loud cheering and waving of hats. Mr. O'Ryan smiled, then frowned and smiled again.

'Silence, friends!' said Father Pat with uplifted hand. 'I was about to say that Misther Kennedy, wid your permission, will rade his spache, for, as you know, he doesn't make pretinsions to orathory. But you'll give him a dacent hearin', for he's a good man an' an ould frind iv mine. Now, Misther Kennedy.'

Father Pat sat down. Mr. Kennedy looked

about on either side with uncertain eyes, glancing at the paper in his hand as he rose. Nora crouched close against Martha, tightly grasping the old woman's hand.

Mr. Kennedy was greeted with deafening cheers. There was an expectant hush when he made a trembling step to the front of the platform. Mr. O'Ryan moved his chair a little to have a better view of the speaker's face.

For several moments Mr. Kennedy looked blankly about, turning the paper in his hands. His face was pale, his figure shrunken.

'Go on, sor,' said Father Pat authoritatively.

Mr. Kennedy started. He began in a low voice which sometimes subsided to a whisper.

'People iv Ballycusha,' said he, reading from the speech which Mr. O'Ryan had written for him, 'you need no inthroduction to me frind, Ignatius O'Ryan. He has bin livin' amongst you for some time, an' you have larned to appreciate the great gifts iv orathory, statesminship, an' sagacity which preiminintly distinguish him.'

Here Mr. Kennedy stopped, looking as if he were going to fall. Mr. O'Ryan coughed sternly. Father Pat said again authoritatively:

'Go on, sor!'

Mr. Kennedy turned to look imploringly at the chairman, who frowned.

'Go on, sor,' repeated Father Pat; 'don't keep the people waitin'.'

'Distinguish him,' continued Mr. Kennedy, reading with an effort. 'Whin I inthroduce him to you as yir future mimbir, I inthroduce a man whose great heart throbs in sympathy wid the sorras iv his down-throdden counthry; a man whose brain is divoted to the task iv liftin' his counthry to her rightful place among the nashins iv the earth; a man whose iliquence will startle an' confound the assimbled tyrants iv St. Stephin's; a man——'

'Martha,' whispered Nora excitedly, 'I can't stay here. Come away!'

'Shurely, shurely, chicken!' said the old woman, hastening after her mistress.

When they returned to the farm, Martha resumed her duties in the kitchen. Nora lay on the sofa near the window in the sitting-room. She felt exhausted. Sensations of heat alternating with chills passed through her.

At length she fell into a light slumber, which was disturbed by a footstep in the hall, followed by the appearance of Val Blake. As she rose, he stooped, kissing her on her forehead, which was cold and damp. She raised her face. Her eyes were much larger, he thought, than he had ever seen them. She smiled faintly as she released herself.

When she sat down, he studied her features with a new feeling of terror. She seemed to have become taller and her chest narrower. She had her hands on her lap, moving the palm of one slowly across the back of the other, an operation she watched as if it were interesting.

'Nora,' said he, 'you're not looking very strong.'

'No, I'm not strong, Val, but there is nothing the matter with me.'

'Oh no, of course; there's nothing the matter with you. Oh no, of course, there's nothing. You're pulled down a bit, though, and I don't wonder at it. I heard about the burning of the rick. That was an infernal business, Nora, but never mind, your father will be compensated for his loss.' She remained silent, watching the movement of her hands. 'It was done by those League wretches,' continued Val; 'they stick at nothing. The moment I heard it, I knew at once; that is, I suspected. Nora, do you suspect anyone?'

'No, Val, why should I?' she replied, without looking up.

'I don't mean,' explained Val, 'the person or persons who actually put the match, you know, but the instigator. Now, who is the instigator? Who is the infernal rascal who set on the murderers of poor old Paddy, and got your father's ricks burned? Can't you guess?'

'I cannot indeed, Val.'

He knelt before her to quiet her hands, which had begun to tremble. As he stroked them, he looked at her bent head.

'The man who got Paddy murdered,' said he, 'and burned your father's hay, Nora, is a fellow who came to Ballycusha, God's knows how or whence, and his name's O'Ryan.'

'That's me name, sor!' exclaimed a voice from the door.

Val started to his feet to confront the speaker. Nora rose, too, but sat down again as Mr. O'Ryan advanced into the room arm-in-arm with her father. Mr. O'Ryan held his head high. Mr. Kennedy's head was bowed.

'Come, sor, what have you to say about me, sor?' demanded Mr. O'Ryan, drawing himself up.

'How are you, Mr. Kennedy?' said Val, holding out his hand.

But Mr. Kennedy did not appear to see the hand. He glanced quickly away, muttering:

'I wish you well.'

Val bit his lip, blushing at what he considered an unwarranted slight. Mr. O'Ryan, folding his arms, stood before him.

'Now, sor,' said he, 'I hard you mintion me name whin me frind, Misther Kennedy an' me-

self, caught you on yir knees before that young lady. Now, sor, what have you to say about me?'

Val, turning his back abruptly, went to Nora, holding out his hand.

'Good-bye, Nora,' said he impressively.

She took his hand, pressing it between hers. She looked at him with intense wistfulness. He coloured again.

'I will see you to the door,' said Nora, rising.

Mr. O'Ryan turned quickly to the farmer.

'Misther Kennedy, sor, d'you hear this?' he exclaimed.

Mr. Kennedy looked up.

'Nora, I wish you to remain,' said he.

'Nora,' said Val, 'do not risk humiliation for me! I understand all, believe me. Your father has changed his opinions, and for that reason thinks it necessary to insult me. However——'

'Masther Val,' said Mr. Kennedy earnestly, 'you are mistaken. I——'

'Oh, well, no matter,' returned Val, shrugging his shoulders.

He brushed past Mr. O'Ryan, who stepped out of his way. Next moment the front-door closed behind him. Nora was leaving the room.

'Nora,' said her father gloomily, 'Misther O'Ryan wishes——'

He paused, as if there was something choking him.

'Yes, father?' said Nora gently.

'Wishes to spake to you,' said her father, with an effort.

'Oh, father, not now, not now!' She gazed beseechingly at him, seemingly unconscious of Mr. O'Ryan. 'I am not well, indeed, father.' She pressed her hand to her bosom. 'I wish to go to my room and rest.'

Mr. Kennedy looked anxiously towards Mr. O'Ryan, who smiled graciously.

'Miss Kennedy can plaze herself,' said he, bowing. 'Any time will suit me.'

Nora passed out, breathing heavily as she toiled upstairs to her room.

XXIV.

AT THE GATE.

For five successive days Mr. O'Ryan called at the farm to see Nora. On each occasion she refused to go to him, despite the importunity of her father. One day old Martha met Val Blake in the town, and described the persecution of Nora with such effect that Val's chivalrous feelings conquered his wounded pride. That same night he met Nora at the side gate of the farm. The faithful Martha hovered in the rear to give notice of danger. Nora was muffled in a cloak. When she approached, Val instantly took her in his arms, kissing her passionately.

'My poor Nora!' said he.

'Oh, Val!' she exclaimed in such heart-broken tones that he pressed her again to him until her breath became short.

'I have heard of your suffering,' said he, 'and of the way your father persecutes you. Is it true,

Nora? Can it be possible? I can't think it of Mr. Kennedy, who was always so fond of you.'

'Ah, Val dear, you do not know,' sobbed Nora. 'It is more than I can bear.'

He kissed her again.

She raised her face sadly, the shawl falling back on her shoulders.

'Father never calls me little woman now!' said she.

'Poor child!' said he. 'But Martha tells me there is worse than that—this O'Ryan business, for instance. What does it mean?'

She pressed close to him, looking back towards the farm with a hunted expression.

'Val,' said she, 'father wants me to marry O'Ryan.'

'Good God, no! It is impossible. You are mistaken, Nora.'

He stepped back to gaze into her eyes, placing his hands on her shoulders.

'He has not mentioned it to me in words,' said Nora; 'but I know it is in his mind. I am not mistaken. Oh, what shall I do!'

She piteously wrung her hands. He put his arm round her waist. They paced the lane in silence. Presently he said:

'Nora.'

'Yes, Val?'

'Will you marry me?'

There was a moment's pause. Nora was trembling from head to foot. Her lips moved, but at first she was unable to articulate; then she said:

'Val, do you mean it?'

'Of course I do,' he replied firmly. 'Listen, Nora. Since I saw you last I have scarcely slept a wink. I knew there was some trouble brewing for you. At first I tried not to think about it, but now there is an end to all my hesitation. I know now that I can never put you out of my life. I must have you always with me. Yes, Nora, you must be my wife.'

'But, dear, are you sure you will never repent it?'

'No. The struggling is all over, Nora. I was never happy in my life before until now. Oh, Nora, I am really happy now!'

'My darling Val! Oh, you have lifted a weight off my life. Oh, Val, how I love you!'

'Do you? Do you really, dearest?'

'Better than all the world.'

As their lips met Martha approached.

'Miss Nora!' she cried.

There was no reply. The old woman, stealing closer, pulled Nora's shawl.

'Miss Nora, darlin'!'

The two lovers parted suddenly. Nora turned round, panting, to her nurse.

'Ah, shure, don't be frightened, darlin'!' said Martha. 'But I hear the masther's step comin' up the lane——'

'Oh, Val!' said Nora, turning to him. 'I must go.'

Putting his arm round her again, he walked with her towards the gate.

'But, Nora,' said he, 'we have not settled matters. I want you to meet me here to-morrow night. I shall have a car ready. We can drive into the station and catch the ten-thirty express for Dublin. Don't interrupt me, Nora; I have thought it all out. There, in Dublin, we can be married quietly in a registry office——'

'But, Val, it is so soon!'

'Not a moment! They are killing you by inches. I must and shall save you. Come, dearest——'

'Miss Nora! Miss Nora!' cried old Martha, in a loud whisper.

'Will you meet me?' asked Val.

Nora thought a moment. Then she put her arms round his neck, saying:

'To-morrow night, at ten, I shall meet you here, Val.'

He kissed her.

'My darling!' said he.

'Miss Nora!'

Martha came hurrying towards them up the dark lane.

'May I bring Martha with me, Val?' whispered Nora.

'Yes, of course. Martha by all means. Good-bye, darling—wife!'

They embraced and parted. Nora hurried to the impatient Martha.

They had to go round by the yard to get in at the kitchen door. As they crossed the yard they met Mr. Kennedy coming from the stables.

'Who's there?' said he. 'Is that you, Nora?'

Nora stopped, holding Martha's hand, until her father approached, peering into their faces.

'Where have you been?' he asked sternly.

'Taking a little walk,' replied Nora, trembling.

'You seem mighty flusthered for a little walk,' said he.

Nora tossed her head, with a return of her old sauciness.

'I was running a race with Martha. That's no crime!'

She passed him in her old fashion, with independent step. He watched her and Martha until they went in through the kitchen door. Then he struck his hands fiercely together as he walked back to the stables.

'I must turn me heart to stone,' he muttered.

That night Nora lay in bed trembling in ecstasy. Though she had several coughing fits, she laughed at them, thinking, now that the hope of her life was realized, happiness would soon cure her cold. Next day she packed her best dresses into two large hand-bags for the projected flight. About noon Mr. O'Ryan called at the farm. She sent Martha to say she was ill. He went away. Meeting Mr. Kennedy in Ballycusha, he complained to such effect that, when Nora's father returned, he instantly went into the sitting-room to find her. As she was not there, he walked to the foot of the stairs to roar 'Nora!' several times, so loudly that the servants trembled. Nora came from her room. As she descended the stairs, Mr. Kennedy said fiercely:

'Come here, girl! I want to say a word to you.'

He entered the sitting-room. Nora clutched at the banisters. But as she thought of Val she smiled and felt strong. She entered the room, passing her father, who was standing near the door, and sat down on the sofa. A lamp burned on the top of the piano, beneath her mother's portrait.

Mr. Kennedy struck his fist violently on the table.

'Now, then,' said he, 'how is it you refused to see Misther O'Ryan agin to-day?'

'Why are you so anxious for me to see this man?' asked Nora quietly.

'I'll tell you why: I should have tould you before—but betther late than never. He wants to marry you.'

'And do you want me to marry him?'

'Why not?' shouted her father. 'What's the matther wid him? He's goin' to be a Mimbir iv Parlimint. You don't expict to marry higher than that, do you? There are worse min in the wurruld than O'Ryan——'

Nora started to her feet.

'Father,' said she, 'I refuse to marry that man. I'd rather die. You've been persecuting me about him until you have made my life a burden to me. Why don't you kill me at once? I loved you once, father—yes, I loved you better than all the world—and now I hate and despise you!'

Sinking on the sofa, her head aside, her face covered with her hands, she burst into tears. Mr. Kennedy grew very pale. He looked at the portrait of Nora's mother above the piano.

'"Hate,"' said he slowly, '"an' despise me?" Hate an'—ay, that ends it. Nora, girl, don't cry. Yir poor ould father has another way out iv this. Don't cry, little woman, don't cry!'

She looked suddenly up. He was gone. She sat with dilated eyes, repeating his words to herself.

What did he mean? A horrible suspicion seized her. She ran upstairs. The door of her father's room on the second landing was closed. Quickly turning the handle, she stood on the threshold gazing in. Her father was on his knees beside the bed. He had not heard her. He rose, looking upwards.

'May God forgive me,' said he, 'an' watch over my poor child!'

Advancing to the fireplace, he took down a gun; but Nora, rushing towards him, seized his arm.

'Father!' she shrieked.

He turned a livid face towards her. She clung with both arms around him.

'Not that, not that, father!' she cried. 'Oh, father dear, put it away, put it away!'

He gazed blankly at her.

'Isn't it betther so, little woman?' he muttered.

'No, no, no!' exclaimed Nora frantically. 'You shan't do it, father. Oh God! put away that gun, or I shall go mad. Yes, father, yes, yes, give it to me.' She took it from his nerveless hands and placed it in a corner; then, returning quickly to him, she knelt clinging to him. 'You won't do it, father? Oh, promise me! See now—your own child, the little woman, father dear! Oh God!' she cried, bursting into hysteric laughter. 'You don't know, father, that I really like Mr. O'Ryan.

What folly! Of course I shall marry him—of course, dear. It was so wrong of me, oh, it was wicked of me not to do so before! But I will marry him, I will indeed, father—do believe it. Whenever you please. And, father, listen: I'll be a good wife to him. Shall I swear it?'

'Swear it? No, dear, no.'

'Then I promise it. Sit down, father, now—here in the chair. And I'll sit on your knee. Yes, father, little woman. You would not break my heart, father?'

She had dragged him into the chair. She sat on his knee. As she spoke, she put her arms round his neck, crushing her sobbing face against his shoulder.

'Break yir heart, child? God forbid!'

'But, father, if you did that, it would break my heart. You won't ever think of it again, father. Say you won't.'

He drew in a deep breath, placing his hand on her head.

'It is all over, little woman,' said he solemnly. 'I promise you.'

'Oh, father,' she exclaimed, 'that is good of you!' She held his face, pressing it between her palms. 'And now, father dear, don't you be worried any more. I shall marry Mr. O'Ryan—indeed I shall! You know he is very nice. Of

course I was a bit foolish. But then, dear, there's an end of that. Besides, after all, it is something to be the wife of a Member of Parliament. Yes, I'll be somebody then.' She wound her arms convulsively about his neck, adding: 'I'll live in London, too, when the House sits, and go and hear my husband make great speeches. I can sit in the ladies' gallery, you know, He's very clever. I'll be proud of him, I know. Yes, I've been a silly girl. I ought to have felt so glad of the offer. I see now it's a fine one.'

He gazed gloomily into the fireplace.

'It wud be a relafe to me,' said he slowly, 'if you cud like him a bit.'

'Of course I'll like him, father. You see if I don't make him a good wife!'

'Ay, if you cud get to think that way, now,' said Mr. Kennedy with renewed hope, 'and not to look on yirself as a kind iv sacrifice, as it were——'

'Sacrifice?' exclaimed Nora, laughing as before. 'Oh, father dear, you are silly! Don't I know it is all for my own good you are thinking? And,' she added rapidly, 'when you wish me to marry him, that is enough. I love you, father dear, don't I?'

He put his arms round her.

'Little woman!' said he hoarsely.

'Yes, and there it is, you see,' said Nora. 'It is my duty to do as you wish. Sister Angélique always said so, and she is a true saint. Don't you fret about the little woman. She'll be all right, and we'll be happy yet, father.'

They heard Martha crying 'Miss Nora!' from the hall. Nora slid from her father's knee. When she reached the door she hesitated. Hurrying back to where he sat dejected in his chair, she put her hands on his shoulders.

'Look at me, father,' said she.

He looked up, trying to smile.

'You promise me,' she said significantly.

'No fear!' he replied.

She kissed him on the forehead. She went downstairs slowly. As she reached the hall, the clock began to strike. She hurried to the kitchen, almost upsetting old Martha, who, with her bonnet and shawl on, was coming out again.

'Why, pigeon, what is the matter? Where's yir cloak?'

'Give me your shawl, Martha,' whispered Nora. Clutching Martha's shawl, she wrapped it swiftly round her own face. 'I am not going. Something has happened, Martha. I am not going.'

She ran through the kitchen out to the yard, while old Martha sank into a chair.

Val Blake had been impatiently pacing up and

down for ten minutes at the rendezvous. Those ten minutes seemed to him ten hours. He had on his driving-coat and gloves, his hat pulled close to his eyes. On the road stood the pony trap, in charge of one of the stable-boys from the Castle, whom Val had bribed.

He stamped his feet as he walked, repeatedly looking at his watch. At length he heard the dry leaves of the lane crackling beneath quick footsteps, and hurried to the gate. Nora ran up breathless, her head muffled in the cloak.

'What kept you?' asked Val reproachfully, as he felt for the latch of the gate.

Nora put her hand on the top bar.

'Val, don't open the gate!' she exclaimed.

'Why not?'

He started, looking across at her white face, which she turned aside without replying.

'Is your father about?' he asked, suspecting that all was discovered.

She made no reply, but rustled the dead leaves at her feet. He looked more closely at her.

'Why,' he exclaimed, 'you are not dressed for travelling! Nora, what is the matter?'

She looked up at him.

'Oh, Val!' she cried.

'What—what has happened?'

He was lost in bewilderment. She wrung her hands.

'Val,' said she, 'I am not going.'

'Not going?' he repeated mechanically.

'No, and I shall never see you again! Val, listen! I know you will hate me. I have promised to marry Mr. O'Ryan. Oh, Val, I know you despise me. I could not help it. I have renounced everything—even you. You don't know what I suffer. But I must renounce all. Oh yes, Sister Angélique always said——'

'Damn Sister Angélique!'

'Oh, Val, please! But you don't understand——'

'I understand this,' cried Val furiously: 'I understand that you are—— But no matter! Good-bye.'

He walked swiftly to the trap and jumped into it. Shouting to the boy to turn the pony's head round, he drove homeward, without a glance at the gate, where Nora stood pressing her hands together.

XXV.

THE DEBT IS CANCELLED.

In the course of a few days Mr. O'Ryan called again. Nora was sitting before the kitchen fire. According to her habit of late, she had a shawl about her shoulders. When the knocker of the front-door announced a visitor, she looked up sleepily. Martha, hastily wiping her hands in her apron, hastened to attend the summons.

Presently returning, Martha stooped over Nora's chair.

'It's him agin, pigeon!' she whispered.

'Mr. O'Ryan?' said Nora.

Martha nodded, adding, as Nora rose, adjusting her shawl:

'Shure, yir not goin' to him, pigeon?'

Nora made no reply, but walked feebly out. In the sitting-room she found Mr. O'Ryan. He stood in his best black clothes, balancing an umbrella and hat in his hand. He advanced to meet her.

'This,' said he, 'is indade an unixpictid pleasure.'

Nora gave him her hand. He bent low to kiss it in courtier fashion. When released it fell listlessly to her side. She shivered as she sat down in the nearest chair. Then, when she looked dreamily at him, as if he were two miles distant, two bright red spots appeared high in her cheeks.

'I owe you an apology, Mr. O'Ryan,' said she. 'I could not see you latterly. I have been far from well.'

'Belave me,' said Mr. O'Ryan, who was surprised by her emaciated appearance, 'I'm most thruly sorry to hear it. I hope yir attindints are attintive to you?'

He laid his hat on the table, his umbrella alongside. Placing his hand on the back of her chair, he bent over her in sympathetic attitude. His presence affected her like a cold atmosphere. She turned her head aside.

'They are very good,' said she.

'There's one iv thim I've a great ibjiction to,' said he: 'that ould cratur, Martha.'

'She is the best of all,' returned Nora. 'She is very good to me. She has always been my kindest friend. She was my nurse.'

'Undher those circumstancis,' said he, 'I'm very sorry to say a wurrud agin her. But the fact is

she's a disateful ould cratur. Me frind Father Pat had to dismiss her.'

'I did not hear that.'

'See that, now! Of coorse she tould you something else. I'll be bound she makes up sthrange stories about meself, now?'

'I've never heard her say a word against you, Mr. O'Ryan.'

'Is that so?' said he, greatly surprised. 'Well, that's somethin'. Anyhow, I fale bound to place you on yir guard. She's a quare ould woman, an' wandhers a bit in her mind.' Nora made no rejoinder. 'An' the raisin,' continued Mr. O'Ryan, lowering his voice, as he fixed his gaze on the back of her head, 'why I don't care to have disateful people about you is because I've taken a great fancy to you. I suppose yir father tould you?'

She crushed her hands between her knees. The atmosphere seemed to grow suddenly oppressive.

'He told me so,' she replied.

'An' you have no ibjiction?'

'I——' She paused, pressing her lips tightly together, then said with an effort: 'I have no objection. Excuse me,' she added, rising as he knelt to take her hand, 'I—I think I will sit on the sofa. I—I feel weak.'

She swayed a little as she stood; then, walking to the sofa at the other side of the room, sat down.

She had hoped he would not follow her. But he jubilantly looked on her change of position as a lover's challenge, and sat down beside her, whilst she crouched against the head of the sofa, her breathing growing short.

'Shure, thin, it's the happy man you make me,' said he, 'an' it's yirsilf I choose out iv a hundhred. There's many a girl threw herself at me, but, shure, I'm terrible fastidious. You've "no objection," darlint? I'd like to hear you say that agin. Come, now!'

He put his arm around her waist. She made no resistance, even when he drew her close to him. Her head was bent, her hair falling about her face. He laughed as he stooped to kiss her; but she jumped up, flinging out her arms to keep him back.

'No, no!' she shrieked. 'I cannot——'

She reeled, making an ineffectual attempt to clutch the mantelpiece, then fell on the floor, senseless, her face upturned to the ceiling. Mr. O'Ryan sat grasping the sofa with both hands, half stupefied, his eyes almost as fixed as her own.

When he rose he found three of the women-servants, with Martha, in the room. Martha, who was kneeling, supporting Nora's head on her knee, poured forth endearments to her mistress, mingled with sharp commands to the gaping maids. The

women ran for smelling salts, water, and brandy. Mr. Kennedy appeared in the doorway.

'What has happened?' he asked sternly.

Martha, who was damping Nora's forehead with a wet cloth, looked up.

'Oh, masther, jewel, acushla!' she exclaimed. 'Shure that villin has kilt me poor darlin'! Look at yir ould Martha, precious! Jewel iv me heart, open yir eyes. Pigeon, pigeon!'

'This is an unfortunit matther, sor,' said Mr. O'Ryan to Mr. Kennedy. 'I'm afraid the young lady's not over-sthrong.'

Mr. Kennedy was gazing down silently at his daughter's pale face. He turned abruptly.

'Misther O'Ryan,' said he.

'Sor?' said Mr. O'Ryan.

Mr. Kennedy motioned to the hat and umbrella on the table.

'I will walk as far as the road with you,' said he. 'I've something to say to you.'

Mr. O'Ryan, who was not anxious to remain, took up his hat and umbrella, following Mr. Kennedy out.

Neither of the men spoke. The evening was calm. The trees on either side of the walk leading to the highroad were motionless. A cow lowed in the distance as Mr. O'Ryan raised his hat to wipe his forehead.

'I'm thruly sorry, sor,' said he at length, 'that this unfortunit sarcumstance has occurred. But I nadent inforrum a man iv yir intilligince that I had no hand in the matther, as that ould lyin' faymale assarted.'

'Misther O'Ryan,' said Mr. Kennedy slowly, 'I've changed me mind in regard to this matther iv your marryin' me daughter.'

'Changed yir mind, sor?'

'You shan't marry my child,' returned Mr. Kennedy, with a firmness which covered intense passion.

'Well,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, 'to be candid, sor, she's mighty dilikit for marryin' at prisint.'

'Prisint or future,' said Mr. Kennedy, 'you shall nivir marry her.'

They walked on again in silence, slowly pacing to the highroad, which began to show between the trees.

'It sthrikes me, sor,' observed Mr. O'Ryan, 'that you forgit a sartin sarcumstance iv racent date.'

'I do not forgit,' said Mr. Kennedy, walking with his hands behind him, 'that you found me settin' fire to me own propirty. Did you inform the police?'

'No, sor, you know I didn't. It didn't suit me purpuss.'

'Now, Mister O'Ryan, if I am to go to prison—an' I'll go to prison for twenty year rather than see me child married—if I go to prison, sor,' said Mr. Kennedy, raising his voice as he fixed gleaming eyes on his companion, 'you'll come wid me!'

Mr. O'Ryan started and turned pale.

'How do you make that out?' he asked hastily.

Mr. Kennedy laughed sternly.

'Aisy enough,' he replied. 'You were witness to a crime. You didn't inform the police; therefore, sor, you are guilty iv compoundin' a felony, and I, as a magistrate, tell you so!'

Mr. Kennedy had thought of this long before, but in his state of terror had feared to risk defying this man or Father Pat, who would probably be brought in innocent by any jury in the county. Now, however, being desperate, he played his card. Mr. O'Ryan was silent. Mr. Kennedy pressed his advantage.

'More than that,' said he. 'You have obtained nearly two hundred pounds from me, by way of illection expinses an' so forth. I have yir notes iv hand in me pocket at the present moment. Now, sor, how would a jury look on that? Would they look on it as a bribe?'

They had reached the road. Mr. Kennedy, opening the gate, leaned back against the post with his arms folded. Mr. O'Ryan, with his eyes

thoughtfully lowered, stood before him. Presently he looked up.

'I'm not an unraisinable man,' said he.

Mr. Kennedy made no rejoinder.

'You have me notes iv hand for two hundhred pounds,' said Mr. O'Ryan. 'When do you ixpict paymint?'

'Whin you cease to throuble me an' me child——' began Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. O'Ryan held out his hand.

'Thin, the debt is cancelled,' said he. 'I'll throuble you for thim documints.'

Mr. Kennedy took out his pocket-book. Tearing from the papers those portions which bore Mr. O'Ryan's signature, he handed them to him, replacing the other halves in his pocket.

Mr. O'Ryan looked bewildered.

'What's the raisin iv this!' he asked.

'I give you,' replied Mr. Kennedy, 'that portion which makes yir notes iv no value as a debt. But I keep some iv yir writin' in case you turn informer. They'd be enough to prove a bribe, anyhow.'

Mr. O'Ryan slowly tore his portion of the papers into small bits, scattering them about his feet. Then he looked up.

'You're a clivir man, Misther Kennedy,' said he, 'clivirir than I ivir thought you were. I wish you good-bye, sor.'

He turned, walking away in the direction of the town. Mr. Kennedy shut the gate. He sighed deeply, then, raising his eyes to the sky, said:

'I've saved me child! Glory be to God!'

It had grown dark when he returned to the room, but he could distinguish a group of women servants around the sofa. They fell back as he approached. He saw Martha on her knees, still bathing the forehead and lips of Nora, who lay on the sofa slowly recovering. Mr. Kennedy stood looking down at his daughter. The women drew away to watch him.

'Is she better?' he whispered to Martha.

The old woman looked up.

'She's comin' back,' she replied.

Nora sighed, opening her eyes widely. Mr. Kennedy turned to the women.

'She's betther now,' said he. 'You can go. I'll mind her.' The women went away on tiptoe. Nora stirred and moaned. 'You too, Martha, you may go,' said Mr. Kennedy.

The old woman with difficulty rose from her knees. She gave a long wistful look at her mistress, then shook her head as she left the room.

Mr. Kennedy sat down on the sofa, lifting Nora against his breast. In the gloom he could see her face twitching, her eyes turning about.

'You're betther, darlin'?' he whispered. 'It's me, yir father.'

She turned her face to him, looking at him silently. Then she suddenly put her arms around his neck, hiding her face against his breast.

'Dear father!' she exclaimed.

'Ah, little woman,' said he hoarsely, 'it was only a bit iv a faint, afther all. I've good news for you. You're not to marry O'Ryan.'

'Father, father, father!'

'What is it, little woman?'

'I'll marry him. I will! I will!'

'But I don't want you to. I've squared him. He'll nivir come here agin.'

'Father, father, father!'

'Little woman, what's wrong?' asked Mr. Kennedy anxiously.

'Oh, father, I'll marry him! Don't leave me. I will, I will!'

'But I don't want you to. I tell you——'

'Yes, father, I will, I will!' cried Nora, clinging hard about his neck. She trembled from head to foot.

Mr. Kennedy felt himself going white to the lips. His mouth became suddenly dry.

'Martha!' he shouted, 'are you there? Bring in a light. Quick, in the name iv God!'

He pressed Nora to him as he waited. She still trembled violently, her arms throbbing against his neck. Mr. Kennedy did not speak again until

Martha, white and terrified, hurried in with a candle. Then he forced Nora's arms from his neck, pressing back her face between his hands to look at her. Her eyes were brilliant with delirium.

'Martha,' said Mr. Kennedy huskily, 'send someone for the docthor. Oh, God, my child!'

He lifted Nora in his arms, and she continued to rave as he carried her upstairs to her room.

Meanwhile Mr. O'Ryan hurried into Ballycusha, pausing, somewhat out of breath, in front of the White Horse Hotel. As he glanced at the building from roof to basement, he smiled. Entering with an air of proprietorship, he sent the waiter for Mrs. Rafferty.

When that excellent woman found him seated in her own parlour, he blandly invited her to a chair.

'Bizniss is worryin' work,' said he, 'an' it's a pleasure afther it to have a quiet chat wid you.'

'Deed, an' yir heartily welcome, sor,' returned Mrs. Rafferty.

She unlocked her private cabinet, producing decanter and glasses, which she placed on the table.

'I've just bin payin' Farmer Kennedy a thrifle iv two hundhred pounds,' said Mr. O'Ryan, 'which he lint me the other day whin I ran short iv change. An', between ourselves, I'm glad to be done wid the man for ivir.'

'Shure, thin, how can that be?' said Mrs. Rafferty with anxiety, 'whin ivry wan ses yir goin' to marry the daughter.'

Mr. O'Ryan lay back in his chair to laugh.

'Well, well,' said he, 'how people will invint stories about prominint min!'

'Thin it's not true?' she asked eagerly.

Mr. O'Ryan laid down his glass. He drew his chair nearer, looking at her so steadily that she lowered her eyes and fingered her apron. He drew his chair nearer to take her hand. Mrs. Rafferty grew red about the temples.

'There's only wan woman in the wurruld for me,' said he, in a low voice. 'Her name's Teresa Rafferty. Teresa, in a few days I'll be a Mimbir iv Parlimint. I offer you me hand on the verge iv that ivint. Will you take it?'

'But the childer?' she murmured, trembling. 'Shure, I cud nivir part wid me five childer.'

'And you nivir shall!' said he fervently. 'I'll be a father to thim. Be aisy in yir mind, Teresa, on that head. I'll thrate the little crathurs to the same affection I have for the mother.'

She burst into tears, which were sufficient proof of her consent. Mr. O'Ryan considered for a moment whether he should take her on his knee, but rejected the notion on account of her size, and kissed her willing lips instead.

XXVI.

THE DRUMS PASS.

BALLYCUSHA was astir. The day of the election had arrived. Country people flocked in, adding to the crowd assembled about the steps of the town-hall, awaiting the result of the poll. It was twelve o'clock. Everybody knew that Ignatius O'Ryan would be returned over the weak Conservative candidate. The people, however, waited, not only to hear the result, but to listen to the oratory of the man whom they had returned to the British Parliament. On the outskirts of the crowd stood the Ballycusha fife and drum band, in readiness to escort the new member home in triumph. Meanwhile, they smoked, with their drums slung on their backs.

And Nora lay in bed at the farm. A few days before, Miss Hannah had arrived to act as repentant nurse. Reconciliation had taken place, and Nora was glad to see her. The local doctor had been in attendance, but latterly his opinion had been so

foreboding that Mr. Kennedy, disregarding all thought of expense, telegraphed to Dublin for a specialist, who arrived by the mid-day train, looked at Nora for several moments, and told Mr. Kennedy that the local man had prescribed correctly. Pressed further, he said that there was no use his remaining, as Nora was dying—'might not last till morning,' he said.

Mr. Kennedy, unable to bear the sight of his child lying so restful, was sitting downstairs alone. He was in the stupor of despair. A messenger had been sent for Father Pat, but his reverence could not be approached, as he was locked up in the town-hall watching the counting of the votes. The messenger, having returned, was sent to ride twenty miles for the nearest priest. Mr. Kennedy waited for his return with some anxiety, which he encouraged as a foil to the sense of desolation. He walked noiselessly about, from kitchen to room, from chair to window, his mind constantly dwelling on the restful young face upstairs, with the thin hands lying outside the bedclothes. Early in the day Nora asked for Val, and he had been sent for.

The servants spoke in whispers. The terrible silence of the house was only broken by Nora's short cough, which passed through her father like a knife as he sat alone in his despair. Occasionally

he started to listen to Nora talking to her aunt in that queer voice which had come to her latterly, a peaceful, gentle voice, distant, soft, and inexpressibly affectionate. After her aunt's reply, silence ensued; and Mr. Kennedy, who had sat up to listen, would sink down again in his seat.

The stairs creaked. There was a sound of hurrying footsteps. Miss Hannah came into the room, looking round with a terrified face. Mr. Kennedy sat motionless in his chair, his chin on his breast. She caught him by the shoulder. He looked at her, then suddenly stood up.

'She has got a change,' whispered his sister. 'Oh, Joseph, Joseph!'

He dug his nails into his palms, raising a pallid face to the ceiling, but did not speak.

'And to think,' sobbed Miss Hannah, 'that it has all come from a neglected cold!'

He turned on her with suppressed passion.

'Niglected cold!' he exclaimed. 'What do you prate of, woman? The child upstairs,' he added, lifting his shaking hand, 'is murdhered——'

Miss Hannah faintly recoiled from his menacing figure.

'Murdered?' said she.

'Murdhered!' he repeated. 'By her father.'

'Oh, Joseph!' she protested.

He struck himself fiercely on the chest.

'Neglected cold!' said he bitterly. 'Here, here, woman, is the murdherer's heart. Let me die to-day, to-morra, fifty years hence, it will be with me day an' night. I murdhered my child, an' I know it.'

He walked to the door. There he met Val, but did not see him. Val, with fright in his face, stood aside as Mr. Kennedy passed. Miss Hannah silently motioned him to follow, and the three went upstairs.

When they entered the room, Nora was lying with eyes turned towards the ceiling, her fingers aimlessly groping at the bedclothes.

'Darling,' said Miss Hannah, 'here is your father and Master Val.'

Nora turned her head on the pillow. She smiled. Her dilated eyes, already lustrous, grew brighter. She held out her hand to Val. Taking it silently in his, he sat down on the side of the bed. Mr. Kennedy stood with his hand on her head. Nora for several moments gazed fondly at Val with the shadow of her old vivacious expression.

'It is good of you to come,' said she.

He tried to reply, but could not. As he looked at her wasted face and felt her thin damp hand in his, his heart began to throb violently.

'They think I am very ill,' said Nora. 'Father and auntie—they think I am worse than I am.

But I am getting well. I am much better to-day.'

Pausing for breath, she turned her face to the ceiling, lying restfully awhile, then looked affectionately at him.

'I have no pain,' she said. 'I will be better soon, won't I?'

'Yes,' replied Val, with choking throat, 'you will be better soon.'

She turned thankfully to gaze again towards the ceiling. The drums began to beat. Miss Hannah, standing at the end of the bed looking at her niece, sobbed, saying, below her breath:

'To think that she is going without the Sacrament!'

She glided from the room, wringing her hands, and hurried downstairs to see if the priest had arrived.

Nora turned to Val.

'I will get up to-morrow,' said she. 'Where are you, father?'

'Here, my child.'

She let her head slowly fall back to see him.

'May I get up to-morrow, father?'

'Ay, little woman.'

The drums beat louder and louder. The procession escorting Ignatius O'Ryan, M.P., was passing the farm. The people sung 'The Wearin' of

the Green' as they went by with trampling feet. Nora's eyes dilated.

'What is that?' she asked.

'It is the people,' answered Val gently. 'O'Ryan has been returned. They are seeing him home.'

Nora's eyes, as they gazed at him, grew wild. Her glance wandered. She sat up, her father hurriedly slipping his arm round her shoulders.

'He'll go away now,' exclaimed Nora excitedly, 'and I won't have to marry him. He saw father burn the ricks. And I was there. Father didn't know. I'd have married him, too, to save father——'

She suddenly fell back. Feeling her father's arm violently trembling around her shoulders, she looked up at him and smiled.

'Father's little woman,' she said.

The drums went throbbing into the distance, fainter and fainter, until the sound of the music and the trampling feet faded away.

And there, in the silent room, Nora lay dead, her head on her father's shoulder, and Val holding her hand.

THE END.

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